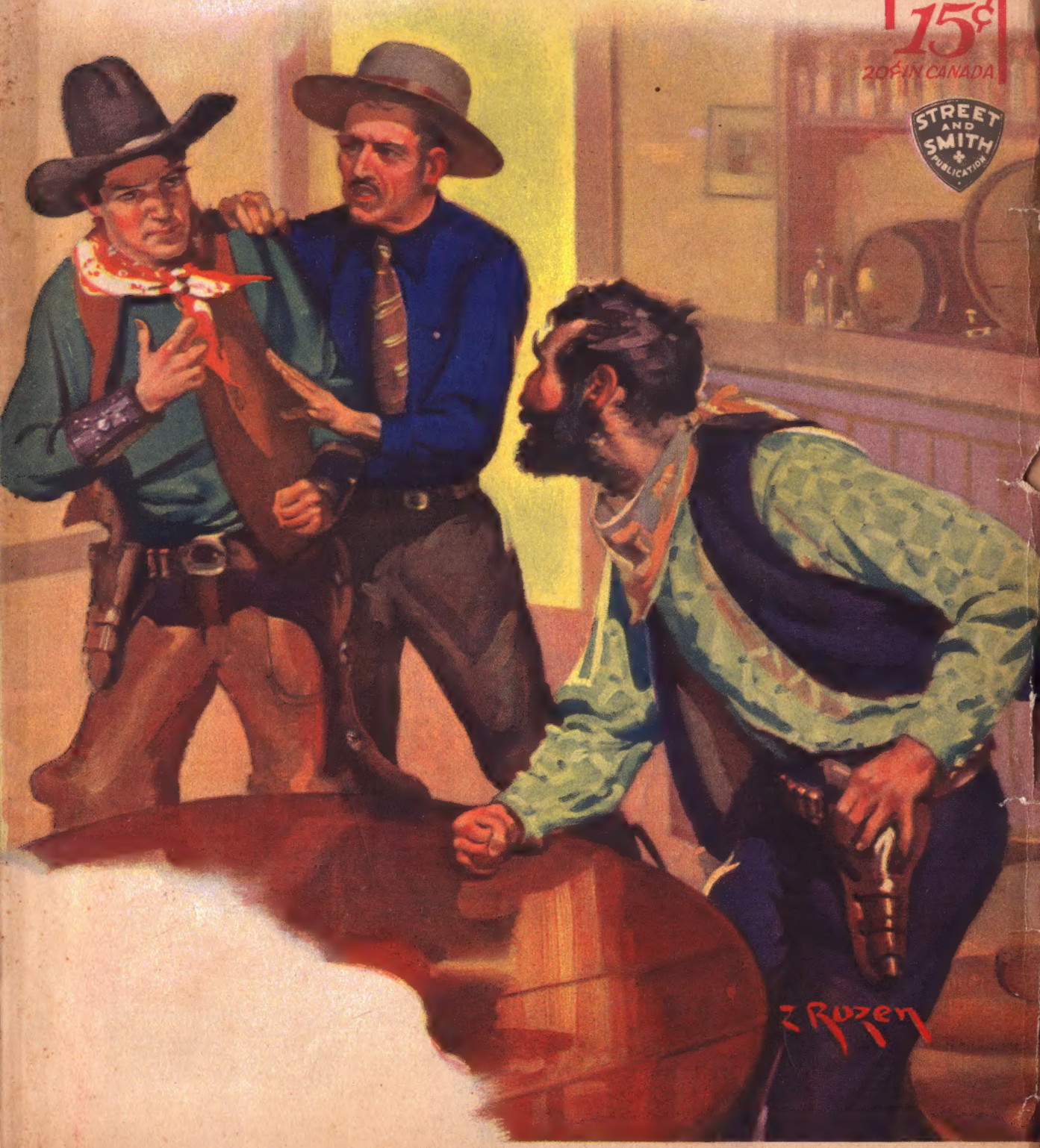
Western Story

Every Week Magazine Aug. 17, 1929

15¢
20¢ IN CANADA

STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION



"Who says so?" bellowed Travis, bounding to his feet.
from THE YUKON DRIVE *by* ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Makes $18 First Day

"Received my first 24 Speedos yesterday; the entire lot is now delivered and more sold. In all my years of selling I never saw anything that met with such universal approval."—W. R. Duncan, Mont.

$5.00 His First Hour

"Received Speedo outfit April 1st. Left the house at 6:30 P. M. Returned just one hour later with 6 orders. Speedos are a necessity in every home."—W. W. Marshall, Ill.

Let These Twin Inventions Hand You

Double Profits...$5 to $11 IN AN HOUR!

Men, here's a proposition that's amazingly simple. Yet the profit possibilities are nothing short of startling! For now, an old, well-known manufacturer offers you direct, TWO unique, patented inventions. Items used every day in every home. Yet so revolutionary that they positively sell on sight! So just read the facts below. Then mail coupon for FREE OUTFIT and FREE TEST OFFERS.

Works Like a Charm
Just insert can in holder and turn crank. Top is cut completely out **inside** the "rim." Juices can't spill out.

Food Pours Right Out
No fuss or muss. No scraping or "spooning." Even foods frozen in the can slip out easily.

No Jagged Edges
Speedo cuts the top out, smooth, slick, and clean. Ends danger of cut fingers.

EVERY man who has cut his eyeteeth in the selling game knows this! The big clean-ups are always made by men who get in on the ground floor with something new and sensational. Think, then, what a doubly sensational chance to coin money is now yours! For here are offered you two unique devices—pronounced by experts everywhere to be absolutely revolutionary — approved by Good Housekeeping Institute, Modern Priscilla, etc.—and real necessities in every home. In your wildest dreams, could you conjure up such an amazing opportunity for quick, easy profits?

A Real Million-Dollar Can Opener

Imagine an *automatic* machine that opens any can, round, square or oval, simply at the turn of a crank. Cuts the entire top out, slick, smooth and clean! No more stabbing and hacking with old-style can openers. No more fingers cut and infected on jagged tin-can edges. For Speedo holds the can—strips the top out—flips up the lid—all in a couple of seconds! No wonder women simply go wild over it. And no wonder 4 out of 5 buy on a 10-second demonstration!

CENTRAL STATES MANUFACTURING CO.
Dept. K-2562, 4500 Mary Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.

The "Magic Groove" Sharpener

Women never saw anything even remotely like this other "twin" invention, the Speedo Sharpener. Just demonstrate the "Magic Groove" and watch their eyes pop open with amazement. Now anyone can put a keen, smooth edge on everything that cuts. Even scissors! Every woman sees instantly that there is an end to the drudgery of dull knives and tools. That's why agents report as much as $10 and $12 in a single hour with Speedo sharpener alone!

Generous Co-operation

This company has been in business over 20 years. Speedos are made entirely in our own big factories, under exclusive patents. Each item is backed by a printed guarantee of **5 years' perfect service.** We give you exclusive territory. Over 100% profit! We train you from A to Z and supply you with a complete selling outfit FREE.

Mail the Coupon TODAY

Any ambitious man with just ordinary common sense can see the possibilities of the proposition at a glance. If you are that kind of a man, I want to send you my FREE OUTFIT and FREE TEST OFFERS. I want to show you what real big money means. Mail the coupon today. Then get set to test the fastest, dizziest profit makers of your life. Write me this minute!

Sharpens Like Magic
Just rest blade on Magic Groove, turn handle. Sharpens a ten-inch blade in six seconds. Puts a razor edge on everything that cuts.

Grinds Scissors Perfectly
Rest blade against guide, give handle a couple of turns—Presto! Scissors are sharp as new.

CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO., Dept. K-2562, 4500 Mary Ave., St. Louis, Mo.
Rush me details of your proposition and FREE TEST OFFER.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

☐ Check here if interested only in one for your own home.

42 Miles on 1 Gallon of GAS

WILL YOUR CAR DO IT?

New Moisture Humidifier & Carbon Eliminator

for all Makes of Cars, Trucks, Tractors and Engines

An amazing Scientific Humidifier has been patented throughout the World that beats any ever got out. It makes engines run ALL THE TIME with the same wonderful efficiency they do on a cool moist night. It gives MORE pep and power, HIGHER top speed, eliminates hard carbon, and gives AMAZING mileage. Fords report 23 to 42 miles per gallon. Other makes (both American and Foreign) report marvelous increases of ¼ to double mileage. Some of the best records are:

	Miles		Miles		Miles		Miles
Buick	28¼	Ford (Model T)	42	Oakland	31	Pierce Arrow	22
Cadillac	21½	Ford (Model A)	40	Oldsmobile	34½	Pontiac	31
Chevrolet	41	Hudson	23½	Overland	41	Reo	26½
Chrysler	30¼	Hupmobile	24½	Packard	21½	Star	41¼
Dodge	31½	Marmon	21½	Plymouth	29	Studebaker	29
Essex	32	Nash	30	Graham-Paige	23½	Willys-Knight	29

And Hundreds of Other Wonderful Records on ALL American and Foreign Makes

Big Profits to Man with Car Spare or Full Time

$350 to $1500 a month

1 man $4,939.68 in 3¼ months
Another $1,656.00 in 58 days
$6,150.00 in 6 months to another. BIG MONEY can be—IS being made

Fitting Motors With VIX
One man sold 8 first morning
Another sells all 3 men can install

Another's profits as high as $100.00 a day.

VIX sells itself by 8 STARTLING demonstrations—BIG, STUNNING, ASTOUNDING, DEMONSTRATIONS. Successful VIX men make MORE MONEY than they ever made before.

Free Trial TRY This New Principle Gas Saver AT MY RISK

Pictures here and at top show Model "B" VIX attached to my own New Model A Ford. This car is wonderfully improved in performance with the VIX Moisture Humidifier. So is every Auto, Truck, Tractor, Taxi, Bus, Marine, Stationary and Aircraft Engine, both American and all Foreign makes.

Try this wonderful VIX Moisture Humidifier and Carbon Eliminator AT MY RISK on YOUR OWN CAR to prove that VAPOR MOISTURE (drawn from Radiator to Engine) gives you that wonderful night driving effect ALL THE TIME with MORE mileage from gas and oil—eliminates hard carbon accumulation—gives MORE power, a SNAPPIER, PEPPIER motor, FASTER acceleration, a SMOOTHER, QUIETER running engine and HIGHER top speed.

VIX will PROVE ITS MONEY SAVING MERIT on your own car by 8 DEMONSTRATIONS—conducted by yourself AT MY RISK—the most SENSATIONAL, most ASTOUNDING, most CONVINCING DEMONSTRATIONS you ever saw. If you don't find from your tests that it does MORE than I claim; return it and it COSTS YOU NOTHING. **I want wide-awake hustling, County, State, Province and National Agencies everywhere, part or full time, to make $350 to $1500 per month filling the great DEMAND for this wonderful invention wherever introduced. Write for my FREE TRIAL and MONEY MAKING OFFER. Use coupon below.**

WALTER CRITCHLOW
Inventor and Manufacturer, 799-A Street, WHEATON, ILL., U. S. A.

GUARANTEED TO SAVE { 1/4 to 1/2 Gas, Carbon Cleaning, Engine Repairs } or Costs You Nothing

FREE VIX offer Mail Now

WALTER CRITCHLOW,
INVENTOR and MANUFACTURER,
799-A Street, Wheaton, Ill., U. S. A.

Please send me without obligation or charge your FREE TRIAL and MONEY MAKING VIX OFFER.

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

WESTERN STORY
MAGAZINE

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

EVERY WEEK

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

Vol. LXXXIX Contents for August 17, 1929 No. 1

ONE NOVEL

While Bullets Sang . . . . . *Max Brand* 37
(A Geraldi Story)

TWO SERIALS

The Yukon Drive . . . . . *Robert Ormond Case* . . 1
An Eight-part Story—Part One
Chinook . . . . . *John Frederick* . . . 93
A Six-part Story—Part Six

THREE SHORT STORIES

Keeping Faith With Flapjack . . *Frank Richardson Pierce* . 29
Shorty Balls 'Em Out . . . . *Ray Humphreys* . . . 85
Two Bad Men . . . . . *Howard E. Morgan* . . 114

TWO ARTICLES

Pioneer Towns of the West (Fort Madison, Iowa) . . . . . *Duane Clark* 126
The Mustang . . . . . *Bob Wilson* 129

MISCELLANEOUS

Brown Bears Ousted by Sheep . . 28
Birds of the West and North America (Black-necked Stilt) . . 36
Woodman, Try These Trees! . . 84
A Community Fire Department . . 92
Menace from Above 92
Lessening the Snake Pest . . . 113
Heroes of Peace 125
Trees in Kansas 128
The Arabian Steed 136
Sheep Versus Dog Versus Man . . . 142

DEPARTMENTS

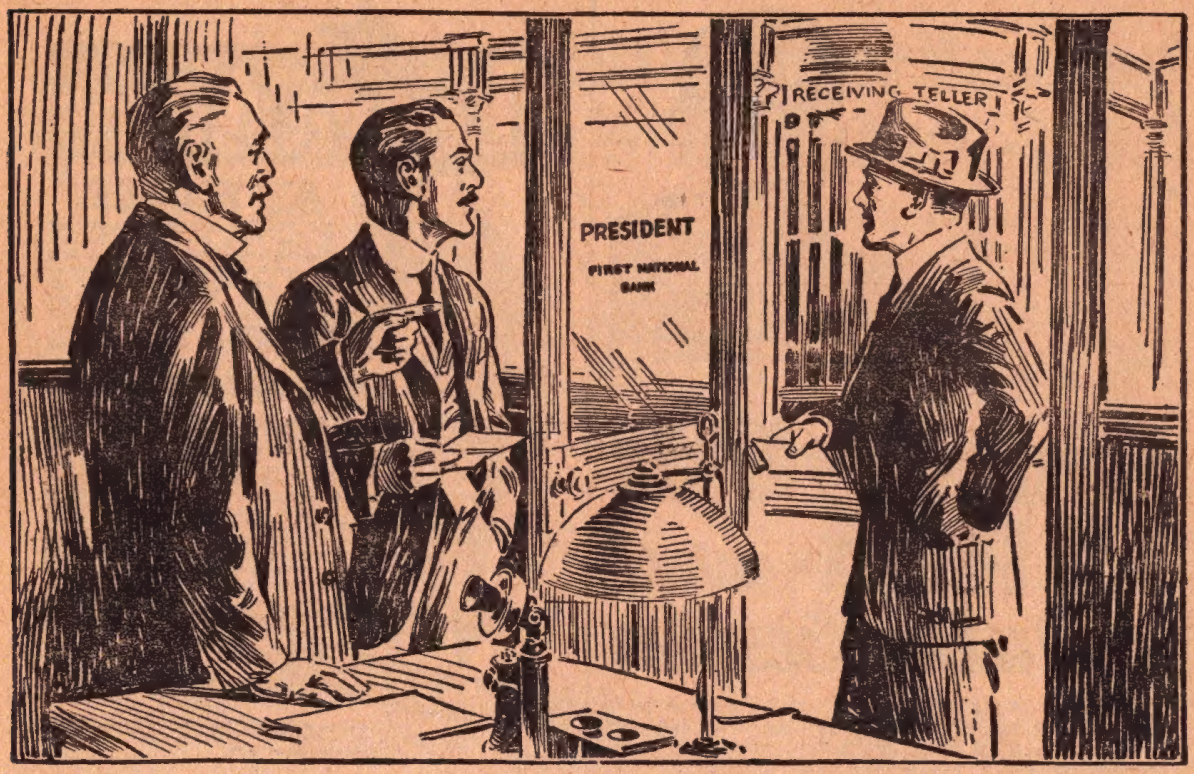
The Round-up . . . . . *The Editor* 134
The Hollow Tree . . . . . *Helen Rivers* . . . 137
Where to Go and How to Get There . *John North* 140
Missing 143

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 Six Months, $3.00 Single Copies, 15 Cents



"He saves $100 a month"

"SEE that man at the receiving teller's window? That's 'Billy' King, Sales Manager for The Browning Company. Every month he adds $100 to his savings account.

"Three years ago he started at Browning's at $25 a week. Married, had one child, couldn't save a cent. One day he came in here desperate—wanted to borrow a hundred dollars—wife was sick.

"I said, 'Billy, I'm going to give you something worth more than a loan—some good advice—and if you'll follow it I'll let you have the hundred too. Take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and put in some of your evenings getting special training. The schools will do wonders for you, I know. We've got several I. C. S. men here in the bank.'

"That very night Billy wrote to Scranton, and a few days later he had started studying at home. Why, in a few months he had doubled his salary! Next thing I knew he was put in charge of his department and two months ago they made him Sales Manager. It just shows what a man can do in a little spare time."

Employers are begging for men with ambition—men who really want to get ahead in the world.

Prove that you are that kind of man! The International Correspondence Schools are ready and anxious to help you prepare for something better if you will only make the start. Do it now! At least find out what the I. C. S. can do for you.

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
"The Universal University"
Box 4912, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Plumbing and Heating
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Architects' Blueprints
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Structural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Aviation Engines
- ☐ Agriculture ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Management
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Secretarial Work
- ☐ Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ English ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Grade School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

Grocery Bills all Paid—and $10 a Day besides

If you want plenty of money to pay all your grocery bills—and $8 to $10 in a day besides—just send me your name and I'll show you a new, easy way to get it. I'll give you the same chance I gave to Van Allen, of Illinois, who reports that he averages more than $100 profit a week. You don't need any experience. G. Karnath, of Minnesota, writes, "Made $20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. Hodges, of New York, says, "Never fail to make a profit of $18 to $20 a day." And right now I offer you the same opportunity I gave these people.

Big Profits for Easy Work

I am President of a million dollar Company. I distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. Last year my customers bought fifteen million packages of my products. This put nearly *two million dollars in the pockets of my Representatives.* Now I invite you to share in these profits. I'll give you *exclusive* territory—help you make big money *from the very start.*

No Capital or Experience Needed

All you have to do is call on your friends and my established customers and take care of their orders. It is easy. I never sell to stores. *You alone get the profit on all orders from your territory.* YOU DON'T RISK A CENT. Keep your present job and start in spare time if you want to. *You have everything to gain—not a penny to lose.*

Don't send me any money—just mail the coupon. I'll send you my amazing new plan that offers plenty of money to pay all your grocery bills and $8 to $10 in a single day besides. And I will tell you how to get a newest model Ford Tudor Sedan without cost. Don't miss this opportunity. Mail coupon TODAY SURE.

MAIL THIS TODAY

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
2245 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Tell me, without cost or obligation, about your wonderful new proposition that offers money to pay all my grocery bills and $8 to $10 in a day besides. Also explain your new Ford Offer.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

© A. P. Co. (Print or Write Plainly)

Make Big Money Learn Autos AT HOME!

IF YOU'RE earning a cent less than $60 a week, send for my Free Auto Book. See how you can get complete instruction at home, covering every branch of Auto work. Learn how you can prepare for the big opportunities—jobs paying up to $5,000 a year. Clip coupon for full particulars.

Earn up to $100 a Week

Whether you're an experienced auto man or not—if you've just had common schooling, find out about this new easy, practical "Job-Way" Training. Read how my employment department helps you get the good jobs. Learn how you can make real money in spare time without giving up your present position. Get all these facts by simply mailing coupon—now.

AVIATION COURSE also included FREE of Extra Charge

Auto Book Free

MAIL THIS FOR FREE BOOK

B. W. COOKE,
Directing Engineer
MOTOR INSTITUTE of America
Motor Institute Bldg., Dept. C275
Evanston, Ill.

Send at once, your FREE Book "Auto Facts." Also full particulars of "Job-Way" Training, and AVIATION COURSE Offer. No obligation on my part.

Name .....

Address .....

Age ..... Occupation .....

NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—Every Deaf Person Knows That

I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night. They stop head noises and ringing cure. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and I will tell you a true story, how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address

Medicated Ear Drum

GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.)
150 Hoffman Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

AVIATION Information FREE

Send us your name and address for full information regarding the Aviation and Airplane business. Find out about the many great opportunities now open and how we prepare you at home, during spare time, to qualify. Our new book "Opportunities in the Airplane Industry" also sent free if you answer at once.

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF AVIATION
Dept. 175-C 3601 Michigan Ave. CHICAGO

1700.00 to 3000.00 A YEAR For LIFE

Work for "Uncle Sam"

Steady Positions

Many U. S. Government Jobs open to men and women, 18 up.

Mail Coupon Today Sure!

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. W-194, Rochester, N. Y.

Rush to me, free information, telling how I can get a U. S. Government job. Send 32-page book describing positions now obtainable.

Name.....

Address.....

...Raised His Pay $4800* After Reading This Amazing Book Which Is Now *FREE!*

* Based on the combined experiences of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn.; A. F. Thompson, Sioux City, Iowa; L. D. Mathers, of E. Cleveland, Ohio, and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED." It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions". I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly was a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen good openings to choose from—and I selected one which paid me over $70 a week to start!

Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is $4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a pay-roll!

Get Your Copy FREE

Right now the book—"The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" — which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely FREE. And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now—for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp! I KNOW!

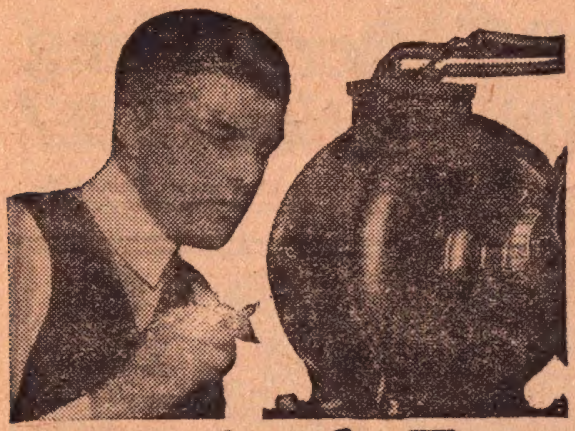
National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. K-582, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligation, please send me a free copy of "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship." Also include full details of your training and Free Employment Service.

Name..... Address.....

Town..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....



Amazingly Easy Way to Get Into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now...and forever... say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to $50, $60, and on up to $200 a week in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you an electrical expert in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!

LEARN WITHOUT BOOKS--In 90 Days

Lack of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers.

Earn While Learning

If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses I'll help you get it and when you graduate I'll give you lifetime employment service. And, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained... on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled... real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations... everything from door bells to farm power and lighting... full sized ... in full operation every day!

No Books—No Classes

No dull books, no baffling charts, no classes, you get individual training... all real actual work... building real batteries... winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc.

GET THE FACTS Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 30 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs... facts... jobs ... salaries... opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

BIG BOOK FREE!

Send for my big book containing 150 photographs telling complete story—absolutely FREE

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. C9-45 Chicago, Ill.

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, H. C. Lewis, Pres.
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. C9-45, Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Lewis: Without obligation send me your big, free catalog and all details of Free Employment Service, Radio, Airplane, and Automotive Electrical Courses, and how I may "earn while learning."

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ *State* _____

"I Wouldn't Take DOUBLE the Price I Paid for My Studebaker Watch"

—hundreds of Our Customers Write

Does it pay to buy a 21-Jewel, 8 adjustment Studebaker Watch direct at factory prices? Thousands of our customers declare that their jewelers admit that the Studebaker watch is a most surprising bargain. Thousands write us that they could not purchase a similar grade watch for much more money. The coupon below will bring you details of this unusual watch buying opportunity. Send it in TODAY!

National Favorite 21-Jewel

STUDEBAKER

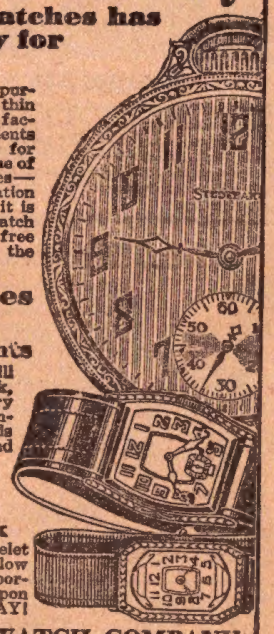
The Insured Watch

There are thousands of Studebaker Watch customers in every state in the Union and Canada—men and women who have answered these ads and obtained lowest factory prices on one of the highest grade watches ever perfected. Save middlemen's profits! The Studebaker name today means the greatest watch value of all history! Send coupon for free book and details TODAY!

This Modern Way

of Buying Watches has Saved Money for Thousands!

Imagine being able to purchase these magnificent thin model watches at lowest factory prices on easy payments out of your income, or for cash! Let us send you one of these marvelous watches—you are under no obligation to keep it. You'll agree it is the world's greatest watch value. Send coupon for free 6-color book and learn the true facts!



Factory Prices

Cash or Easy Monthly Payments

If you write at once, will send beautiful style book, showing lowest factory prices on these lifetime insured watches. Thousands save money this way. Send coupon TODAY!

FREE!

6-Color Book

Luxurious strap and bracelet watches at remarkably low prices! Your greatest opportunity to save! Send coupon for free style book TODAY!

STUDEBAKER WATCH COMPANY

Watches :: Diamonds :: Jewelry

Dept. NO140 South Bend, Indiana

Canadian Address: Windsor, Ontario

STUDEBAKER WATCH COMPANY
Dept. NO140 South Bend, Indiana

☐ Please send me your free catalog of Advance Watch Styles and details of your offer.

☐ Please send me free catalog of Jewelry and Diamonds.

Name _____

Street or R.F.D. _____

City _____ *State* _____

I'll Pay Your Bills

and give you a steady income for the rest of your life if you will take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Pleasant, easy work can be handled in spare or full time.

No Investment Needed

I furnish all capital—I set you up in business, advertise you, and do everything to make you my successful and respected partner in your locality.
Partner may be either man or woman.

All I ask is that you have ambition and can devote a few hours each day to distributing my famous products to friends and a list of established customers. High grade food products, teas, coffees, spices, extracts, things people must have to live.

Your Groceries at Wholesale

As my partner I furnish your groceries at wholesale. Big FREE supply contains over 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Quality backed by $25,000.00 bond.

Iron-Clad Guarantee to YOU of $15 a DAY Steady Income

I don't want you to take any chances. I guarantee your income. Send coupon at once for my signed guarantee of $100.00 a week for full time or $3.50 per hour for spare time work. I go 50-50 with my partners and give valuable premiums.

I Furnish You Chrysler Coach

This is part of my outfit GIVEN to producers. Chrysler closed car to use in our business—it is yours to keep—no contest.

C. W. VAN DE MARK, Pres. & Gen. Mgr.

Health-O Quality Products Co.

Dept. 1093-HH Health-O Bldg.

CINCINNATI, OHIO.

C. 1929 by C. W. V. D. M.

Easy for you to make big money. I look out for welfare of my partners.

$36.47 in Hour and a Half

Mrs. S. M. Jones, mother of four, took in $36.47 first 1½ hours—made $2,000 profit in few months' spare time. C. C. Miner made $200 first 15 days. Wilbur Skiles says, "Besides big commissions you gave me $1,457 in gifts and prizes." Hundreds of others doing as well.

SEND COUPON AT ONCE for APPLICATION

FREE FOOD PRODUCTS COUPON

C. W. Van de Mark
Health-O Quality Products Co.,
Dept. 1093-HH
Health-O Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio

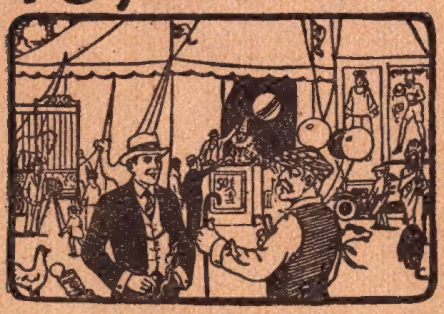
Without obligation on my part, send at once, application for territory and details of partnership offer, free food products.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

$5,000.00 Worth of Prizes



I am going to give away, absolutely free, an 8 cyl. Studebaker Sedan to someone who answers this ad. It will be delivered thru the nearest Studebaker dealer, or winner may have its full value in cash, $2,250.00. This offer is open to anyone in the U. S., outside of Chicago, and is backed by a Big Reliable Company, which has already given away thousands of dollars in cash and prizes to advertise its business.

Solve This Puzzle

There are many objects in the picture of the circus above. See if you can find 5 that start with the letter "C." When you do this, write them on a piece of paper together with your name and address and send it to me right away.

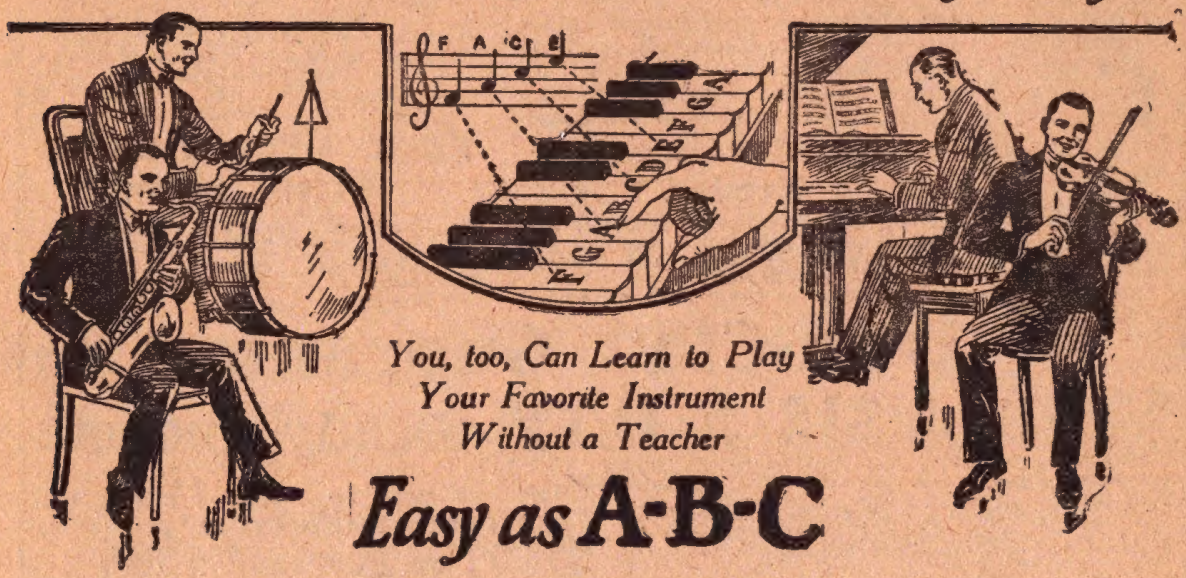
$550.00 Given for Promptness

I am also giving away a Chevrolet Sedan; Victrola; Shetland Pony; Seven Tube Radio; Gold Watches and many other valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, including $550.00 for promptness. First prize winner will receive the Studebaker Sedan and $550.00 cash, or $2,800.00 cash. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded. Find 5 objects in the picture above starting with the letter "C" and send them to me right away with your name and address plainly written. $5,000.00 worth of prizes. Everybody rewarded.

L. E. WILFERD, Mgr. Dept. C142 315 South Peoria Street, Chicago, Illinois

Half a Million People

have learned music this easy way



You, too, Can Learn to Play Your Favorite Instrument Without a Teacher

Easy as A-B-C

YES, half a million delighted men and women all over the world have learned music this quick, easy way.

Half a million—500,000—what a gigantic orchestra they would make! Some are playing on the stage, others in orchestras, and many thousands are daily enjoying the pleasure and popularity of being able to play some instrument.

Surely this is convincing proof of the success of the *new, modern method* perfected by the U. S. School of Music! And what these people have done, YOU, too, can do!

Many of this half million didn't know one note from another—others had never touched an instrument—yet in half the usual time they learned to play their favorite instrument. Best of all, they found learning music *amazingly* easy. No monotonous hours of exercises—no tedious scales—no expensive teachers. This simplified method made learning music as easy as A-B-C!

It is like a fascinating game. From the very start you are playing *real* tunes, perfectly, by *note*. You simply can't go wrong, for every step, from beginning to end, is right before your eyes in print and picture. First you are *told* how to do a thing, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and *hear* it. And almost before you know it, you are playing your favorite pieces—jazz, ballads, classics. No private teacher could make it clearer. Little theory—plenty of accomplishment. That's why students of the U. S. School of Music get ahead twice as fast—*three times as fast* as those who study old-fashioned, plodding methods.

What Instrument for You?

Piano	Piccolo
Organ	Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Violin	Drums and Traps
Clarinet	Mandolin
Flute	Sight Singing
Harp	Trombone
Cornet	Piano Accordion
'Cello	(Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)
Guitar	Voice and Speech Culture
Ukulele	Automatic Finger Control
Saxophone	
Banjo	

You don't need any special "talent." Many of the half-million who have already become accomplished players never dreamed they possessed musical ability. They only wanted to play some instrument—just like you—and they found they could quickly learn how this easy way. Just a little of your spare time each day is needed—and you enjoy every minute of it. The cost is surprisingly low—averaging only a few cents a day—and the price is the same for whatever instrument you choose. And remember, you are studying right in your own home—without paying big fees to private teachers.

Don't miss any more good times! Learn now to play your favorite instrument and surprise all your friends. Change from a wallflower to the center of attraction. Music is the best thing to offer at a party—musicians are invited everywhere. Enjoy the popularity you have been missing. Get your share of the musician's pleasure and profit! Start now!

Free Booklet and Demonstration Lesson

If you are in earnest about wanting to join the crowd of entertainers and be a "big hit" at any party—if you really *do* want to play your favorite instrument, to become a performer whose services will be in demand—fill out and mail the convenient coupon asking for our Free Booklet and Free Demonstration Lesson. This booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*. These explain our wonderful method fully and show you how easily and quickly you can learn to play at little expense. Instruments are supplied when needed—cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3598 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

U. S. School of Music,
3598 Brunswick Bldg., New York City

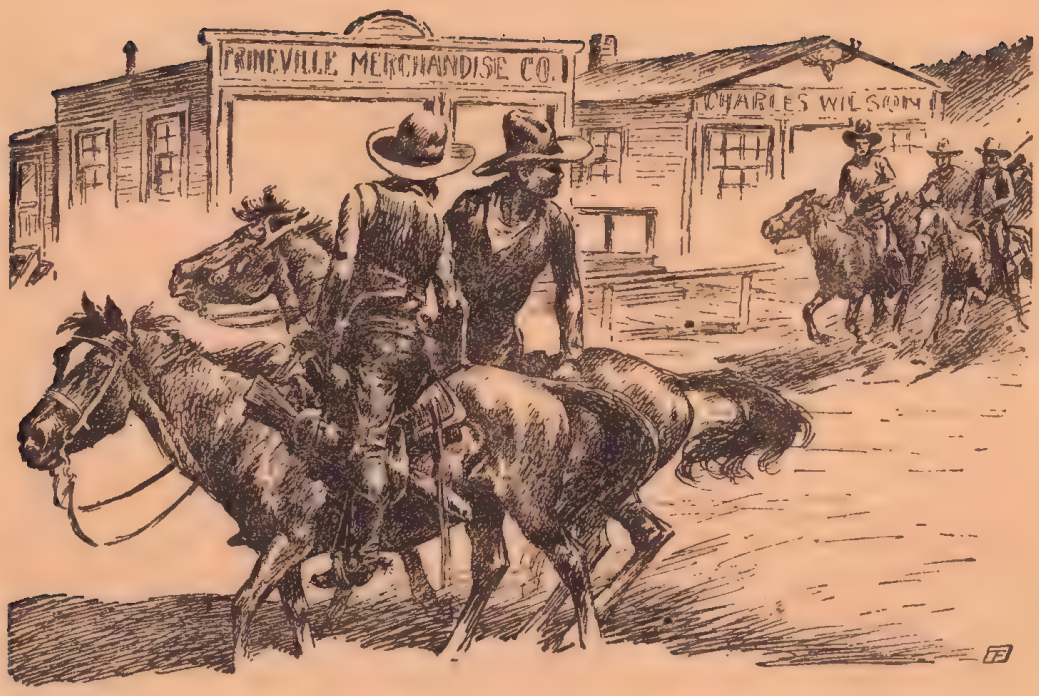
Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson, and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:—

..... Have you instrument? .....

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....



The Yukon Drive

By Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Partners in the Smiling Hills," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WILLIAM RONDO, ESQUIRE.

THE caliber of Mr. William—Bill—Rondo, youthful and self-deprecatory foreman of the McNab ranch on the upper Crooked River, was very thoroughly fixed by the relentless yardstick of the frontier. Appearances, in those colorful times, meant little. In that day and year, in that section of the great cattle country known as the "Oregon High Desert," the color of a gentleman's eyes was not determined by his choice of whisky, action was given preference over boasting speech, a mangy hide often covered good beef, and soft words preceded gun play.

Most women and a few men were misled by the youthful Mr. Rondo's shy, almost shrinking manner, deeming him of little force in a region thickly populated by robust, raw-boned, and spectacular citizens who habitually walked with a swagger, rode like centaurs, plunged blithely into lurid imbroglios at the drop of a hat, and faced death with a grin. This faulty appraisal on the part of the ladies may have been due to the fact that that nebulous attribute known as female intuition had not yet attained the prominence granted it three decades later; more generously, it may be assumed that the error on the part of the few gentlemen was because Rondo's appearance was deceptive.

At first glance he appeared to be slender and of slightly less than medium height. Closer inspection revealed that his shoulders sloped upward toward a sunburned neck of ample girth. His hickory shirt bulged in the region of

the upper arm, and his wrists and hands were broad and powerful. Those skilled in such matters noted that his slenderness was of the hips, a tapering, wedge-shaped physique somewhat similar to that of Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons, an athlete at the moment much in the public eye and youthful imagination.

The deceptiveness of his appearance rested almost solely upon his features, which were singularly youthful of cast and hue. The blistering heat and bitter cold of the high desert, which induced in others a mahoganylike texture in those sections of the physiognomy not protected by whiskers, merely caused the superficial cuticle on Mr. Rondo's smooth cheeks to peel away in successive layers. Thus his somewhat stolid cast of countenance never darkened to the hue of newly cured ham, and his propensity to blush in moments of crises was given full sway. He was of the blond type, moreover, which heightened the boyish effect; his eyes, set wide apart, were blue, and his hair, which was slightly lighter in hue than tawny, was inclined to be curly.

Yet it was noted by observing ones that there were rugged contours to his youthful cast of countenance, that his jaw was square, and that his blue eyes fixed unwinkingly upon friend or foe even while waves of color mounted to the roots of his hair and a bashful grin was upon his lips. It was also thoughtfully recorded by those who had learned that the size of an individual's heart may not be judged by the shadow he casts, that where robust ones swaggered, Mr. William Rondo trotted alongside and kept abreast; when centaur rides were finished, he was still in the saddle; when imbroglios were staged, the shrinking one wrought manfully where the dust was thickest, and when death was to be faced he was also there, in the front rank, blushing, but planted squarely, and with thumbs hooked in his belt.

Thus William Rondo, Esquire, buckaroo, age twenty-six, as he rode toward Prineville on a Saturday night in early spring of that most colorful year in the history of the Northwestern frontier, 1898.

Then, as now, men rode toward the metropolis of the high desert of a Saturday night with hands light on the rein, bronzed faces enthusiastic and almost yearning, licking their parched lips. It was not only liquid refreshment they sought, though the dust of the workaday week was thick on the tongue, but refreshment of the soul, the satisfaction of the gregarious instinct which decrees that while men may toil in loneliness and solitude, they must foregather at intervals where lights are bright, where poker chips clink, and booted feet rest easy on a brass rail.

By twos and threes and larger groups they rode, thundering along trails that were as spokes in a great wheel whose hub was Prineville. Myriad glittering stars arching in a far-flung jeweled panorama over pinnacle and mesa lighted the way. Fire flashed from steel-shod hoofs, sparks trailed from cigarettes drooping beneath sombreros flattened against the wind, and from divers points in the twinkling valley of the Crooked River, staccato shots and wild yells, muted by distance to a tiny echo, announced that the skirmish front of the advancing army was closing in.

Rondo, coming in from a northeasterly direction via the upper Crooked River, rode alone. This was unusual, for the foreman of the McNab ranch was not second in command by virtue of vested authority only, but also by tacit agreement of the hard-bitten crew. Where he led, they followed. But on this night, having ridden forth in squad formation from the Upper Valley, the reckless but observing guardians of the McNab brand had instantly sensed that something heavier than his hat, in a manner of speaking, was on Rondo's

mind. They had forged ahead, leaving him to the meditation he so obviously desired; and Rondo, his teeth flashing as he grinned through the gloom at their facetious farewells, had waved them on.

Other riders bore down upon him from the rear, with a "Hi, Rondo!" and "Ho, Will-yum!" and "Whose funeral, mister?" but Rondo had merely hunched his shoulders sheepishly beneath their onslaught, and presently, after profitless attempts to speed up his leisurely pace, they, too, had thundered away, leaving him to bring up the rear guard in solitude.

He was mounted on a muscular demon of horseflesh, a buckskin range king gathered in with some wild stuff from the brakes south of Mitchell and gentled by his own hands. Steeped in thought, his hand was listless on the rein, and the sagacious animal, thus given a choice of pace, moved at a comfortable walk down the rocky trail that paralleled the chuckling river. Rondo sagged in the saddle. As he rolled a cigarette with unconsicous ease and placed it between his lips, his gaze was fixed on the distant lights of Prineville. He pulled his sombrero lower over his eyes like one who heads into a storm.

Decisions came hard to Rondo. Though they occurred simultaneously in a crisis, he preferred to take his time. Once decided, it was his habit to follow a course of action with the enthusiasm of a pocket hunter for whom no trail is too long. Yet the decision he had made this night was so momentous that, after making the contract within himself, he yet proceeded slowly toward its performance, blushing as he rode.

For William Rondo, Esquire, landless and lowly buckaroo whose fifty dollars per month and found did not loom large even on the easy-going economic horizon of the frontier, was about to attempt that hazardous undertaking known locally as "popping the question"; and the lady was no less than Lila Bodine, haughty and resplendent daughter of Banker Bodine of Prineville, money baron of the high desert.

Day by day during preceding weeks he had thought it out. At first he had been aghast at his temerity in even entertaining the breathless idea. He was aghast still, but determined. He had weighed his chances and fixed them approximately as the losing end of a hundred to one: but these were surely odds enough.

His interest in Lila was of long standing. Three years before, when he had drifted southwest into the high desert from the Condon country, the banker's daughter, then in her teens, was already the acknowledged belle of the Crooked River valley. He had seen her on brief excursions to town and admired her from afar. A high pinnacle in his experience was the first time he had danced with her at one of the democratic social struggles of the day. He had danced with her later, his heart pounding at the pressure of her dainty form against his arm, his ears flaming like torches, the exultant knowledge within him that momentarily she was near, though a gulf yawned between.

Her interest in him dated from the triumphant ball that followed the great annual rodeo the fall before. That occasion, too, was a soaring pinnacle in memory. It had marked the first time she had looked at him with anything more than the smiling, faintly supercilious tolerance with which she regarded all the hopeful, blushing or debonair youths who worshiped, in a manner of speaking, at her shrine. Before that time, he had been but one of the milling crowd that fluttered mothlike about her; on that evening her wide hazel eyes had dwelt upon him with a more intent and speculative appraisal. She had unloosed upon him a devastating smile that had successfully drawn him, magnetlike, from the clutches of other radiant and admiring sirens of the ball; she had

danced with him often, and he had escorted her home.

Concerning that breathless evening, it might have occurred to persons more versed in feminine wiles and more egotistical than Rondo, that Lila's interest in him might have arisen from the fact that he himself was very much in the public eye at the moment. The brilliant syncopated struggle was the climactic event on the long list of the great rodeo day; and he, Rondo, by the grace of good fortune in the arena and—in the opinion of the veteran judges—superlative riding skill and inflexible courage, had been adjudged the all-around champion cowboy. As the blushing bearer of that title, and the owner of the silver-mounted prize saddle that was visible evidence of the honor, he had been, to his acute and visible discomfort, more or less the social lion of the evening. The unworthy thought did not suggest itself to Rondo that the jealous queen of the local social register might have marked him for her special favor that night as a necessary precaution to secure her dominance. He was only thankful, with a deep and humble thankfulness, that fortune had enabled him to win her smile.

Debonair buckaroos far more bold and chesty of front than Rondo might have hesitated at the sheer audacity of the next step in his sentimental campaign. He called on Lila at the Bodine mansion. More than that, he called many times, advancing bashfully upon the banker's stronghold, leaving his horse, reins trailing, in the shadow of the giant poplars that guarded the gates, and striding, spurs jingling, up the graveled walk. Banker Bodine had not, according to hopeful prediction of awed rivals, thrown the blushing one out on his ear. He had merely fixed gimlet eyes upon the brazen youth and clamped thin lips upon his cigar. Lila, a roguish twinkle in her hazel eyes, had permitted languishing hours in the shadowed veranda while stars grew bigger and more bold in the sky above the mesas and the wind whispered in the high poplars.

Lately, the seventh heaven in which Lila's favor had planted Rondo had become slightly overcast. Winter was past; spring was at hand in the high country, but the mellowing of the season appeared to progress in opposite ratio to Lila's manner, which became more aloof and cool. In his benighted and uplifted condition, no inner voice suggested to Rondo that perhaps, in the lady's point of view, a new year had dawned, with new interests and conquests at hand. More and more often, of late weeks, he had called at her home in vain. Others had escorted her home from current social events. He had found it harder to obtain a dance with her, was frustrated in his attempts to see her alone. When circumstances and her whim did permit a treasured interval, he was deeply hurt to find that her eyes no longer met his with interest and kindly tolerance, but rather with more than a suggestion of bored indifference.

Persons less downright of character would have paused at this point and, after due deliberation and with what fortitude they could muster, retired from the field. But Rondo, deep within him, humbly searched his soul to discover in what manner he had failed to measure up to her standards. This self-appraisal staggered him anew. He had, after all, nothing to offer her but youth, endless ambition, nebulous plans for the future. These things were not the coin of the realm to which she was accustomed.

But on the other hand, was the fact that he had not yet acquired an abundance of worldly goods a fair and true test? Banker Bodine himself had crossed the plains by covered wagon as a youth. He, too, had once been penniless. McNab, his own employer, had been a buckaroo on the great Peter French ranch in the Harney Valley.

None of the cattle barons of the high desert had inherited their wealth; they had carved it from the wilderness. He, Rondo, could likewise become an empire builder. With Lila at his side, in terms of the ancient American pastime, the sky was the limit.

As a result of these cogitations, Rondo had decided to put it to the test, stake his all on a single throw. He would "pop the question"; and if Lila pointed out deserts to be crossed and mountains to be scaled, he would cross and scale them all.

Because even a desperate gambler, having taken up the dice, proceeds in leisurely fashion to roll the galloping cubes, Rondo rode slowly down the poplar-bordered dusty thoroughfare that led into Prineville from the east. The courthouse loomed at his left and slid by to the rear. Flaring arc lights on the street corners etched him in bold silhouette in passing. Points of light were caught and held in the sheen of silver trappings, the glint of spur and belt, the black heavy luster of mohair chaps—a slender youth, resplendent in the "war paint" of the range, mounted on a magnificent horse.

Ahead was a brilliantly lighted section where colorful crowds milled. Many horses stood at hitching rails. From swinging doors came bursts of laughter, shreds of music, hoarse shouts, the clink of glasses and rattle of poker chips. The very air vibrated to the many-toned rollicking voice of the carnival town, "wide open" of a Saturday night as thirsty ones of the high desert foregathered.

Rondo turned aside a block from the first saloon and merged into the shadows of a more quiet street. His sagacious horse picked the way he had traveled many times before, and came to a halt in the gloom beneath a sentinel array of whispering poplars. Rondo eased himself from the saddle and left the reins trailing.

He paused, with his hand on the low gate. The great house was brilliantly lighted. The shades were not drawn. He saw Banker Bodine, seated on the veranda, in silhouette against a broad square of window, the outline of his bullet head punctured by the somber glow of his inevitable cigar. Within he saw Lila leaning upon the piano in graceful pose, and, seated at the instrument with his face upturned smilingly to hers as his fingers swept the keys, was a dark-faced youth who was obviously not of the frontier, a self-possessed stranger in faultless attire foreign to the range country.

Even though he appraised the field like a reconnoitering general, observing Banker Bodine planted upon the veranda like some suave but implacable guardian ogre, and that Lila's smiling time and attention were obviously devoted to the debonair stranger, Rondo's hesitation was only momentary.

He pushed through the gate, hitched his belt higher as an unconscious reaction to a crisis, and strode, spurs jingling, up the graveled walk.

CHAPTER II.

A GENTLEMAN FROM THE EAST.

THE banker turned his head owlishly in the direction of the newcomer. He stared at the youth as he mounted the steps and advanced across the veranda, hat in hand.

"Good evening, sir," said Rondo politely, halting before him.

The banker eyed him from head to foot, rolled his cigar between his lips, and clamped it at a new angle that imparted to his heavy, somewhat cold hardness of feature, an intangible suggestion of genuine sardonic amusement.

"Good evening," he responded at length. "Wonderful night, eh?"

"Peach," assented Rondo.

"Sit down," the banker invited. "Sit

down, young man. Drag up a chair. Make yourself comfortable."

Rondo seated himself on the edge of a near-by chair. Half turned toward the banker and the window, his eyes were fixed on the youth at the piano, whose white, powerful fingers were straying over the keys with a seeming aimlessness, like one lost in harmonious reflection. Lila had turned toward the window. Her cheeks were flushed a little; her eyes like stars. Her hair was drawn back in the simple, Madonnalike fashion that became her so well.

"She's getting a taste of this said high society she's always craved," observed the banker, as though his gimlet eyes had read Rondo's thoughts. "That young buck's one of these Eastern dudes who's been to college and knows all about everything from playing the piano to leading a cotillion. Good family, too. Name's Syd Lawson. Son of an old friend of mine, J. J. Lawson, one of them Wall Street octopuses you read about. Syd'll inherit a million or so some day. J. J.'s huffy at the lad at present, on account of some scrape or another, so Syd came West. Headin' for the Klondike. Dropped around to call on Lila. They played around some when they was kids, that time me an' Lila went East ten, eleven years ago."

Rondo knew that the banker was deliberately goading him with each item of this information concerning the stranger, but he gave no sign of it, save a flush that deepened in his smooth cheeks.

"Tickled pink to see him come," continued the banker. "It'll take her mind off some of these grinnin' an' blushin' cowboys that have been clutterin' up her path, so to speak." He shifted his bulk to peer into the window, and nodded owlishly. "It's a treat, ain't it, to be on the outside lookin' in? There's a picture. Two of a kind, eh?"

Rondo turned his gaze full upon the banker's face. The older man stared back, his hard eyes exhibiting a kind of somber amusement. Then, with the sudden irritation of a dominant character encountering an unyielding and none too respectful resistance, he chewed on his cigar.

"Rondo," he said abruptly. "You're dry behind the ears. You can see through a barb'-wire fence. At the risk of appearin' inhospitable, leave me ask how come you honored us with your presence to-night? You didn't crave congenial company an' come all the way from Upper Valley to make talk with me. That would shorely be flattering."

"No," said Rondo, "it's always a pleasure to meet up with you, Mr. Bodine. But I drifted around to-night to call on Lila."

"So?" the banker nodded in appreciation of this blunt rejoinder. "Well, now, come to think of it, seems like I've seen you blushin' on this landscape before. But it's kind of a tough break, that she's otherwise engaged this evening. You've prob'ly observed that yourself, not bein' blind that a way. So it'll be up to me an' you to have a reg'lar visit."

But Rondo shook his head, with a modest grin.

"It's pleasin' to visit with you, Mr. Bodine, but I kind of figgered maybe I could get to talk with Lila for a minute or two. Even if she was—otherwise engaged."

"Can't be done," stated the banker.

In reply to this ultimatum, Rondo leaned forward and tapped on the window pane. Lila turned toward the window. When her gaze focused upon Rondo, revealed faintly in the square of light, she frowned. The youth at the piano turned lazily in that direction, and his idle playing ceased. Shaking her head, the girl held up her hand, with fingers crossed. Then she smiled suddenly and nodded. Beckoning to her companion to follow, she turned toward the door.

"Now just tell me what's the meaning of all that sign language?" demanded the banker.

"Well," said Rondo, "she said she was busy. But she's coming out."

"Fine," said the banker. "An' fetchin' Syd with her! It won't better yore hand none by sizin' up to that dude, young fellow me lad. You craved grief, an' you'll shorely get it, or I'm a Chinaman."

The door opened, and Lila came out upon the veranda. Her companion remained on the threshold and regarded Rondo with polite curiosity. He was a tall youth with lean-jawed, gloomy features, dark hair brushed back from a high, intelligent forehead, and black, bold, somewhat cynical eyes.

"Come on out, Syd," commanded Lila. "I want you to meet one of our noblest and most spectacular cowboys. Mr. Rondo," she told the gilded youth, with an arch glance that caused Rondo to grow hot beneath his silken neckcloth, "was the all-around champion buckaroo at the rodeo last fall. We're quite proud of him."

Rondo sensed now what the banker had meant when he had stated bluntly that a comparison with the Easterner would not better his hand. He fought against the unworthy thought that Lila's manner, words, and pose, her hand on Lawson's arm, were intended to suggest that they two looked amusedly down upon him as from a mutual plane of understanding. He resented instantly the guarded but swift appraisal with which Lawson took in the silver spurs, the lustrous texture of his chaps, the gorgeous sheen of his silken shirt and neckcloth. He felt himself flushing to the roots of his hair as the other's black eyes rested on his face. It added nothing to his composure that Lawson spoke gravely, with a well-modulated voice and ease of manner foreign to the high desert.

"It is a pleasure, sir," he said, "an honor, rather, to meet a gentleman of such accomplishments."

Whether or not there was a veiled, sardonic suggestion beneath the words, Rondo could not determine. He gripped the other's hand, and was astonished at the firmness of the answering pressure.

Standing thus, Rondo and Lila were about of equal height. The banker, too, having risen, was at Rondo's shoulder, a short, pudgy man, hands clasped about his bulging mid-section, puffing with somber relish on his cigar. Lawson loomed above the trio. Lila's face, upturned to his, revealed her in a new and graceful pose.

Having spent his entire life on the frontier, Rondo was suddenly and for the first time aware that in matters sartorial, in poise and polish of manner, a vast gulf yawned between the standards of East and West. His own range "war paint" was correct for gala occasions and Saturday nights in town; but Lawson was of another world. Lila, too, appeared to be of that world, and to a lesser degree, the banker. He, Rondo, was a colorfully garbed outsider.

He was conscious of Lila's manner of standing close to Lawson, smiling a little. He knew that the banker's hard eyes must be gloating upon the scene. Nevertheless he stood erect and faced the others squarely, though he knew his cheeks were hot and was certain that his ears were flaming like torches through the gloom.

"You won't be in these parts long, Mr. Lawson?" he inquired.

"No," said Lawson. His boldly cynical eyes rested somewhat quizzically on Lila. "It's pleasant here, of course. Most attractive region. But I'm on my way North."

"Isn't it wonderful?" breathed Lila. "He's going to the Klondike. It frightens me when I think of that terrible trail." She shivered and smiled up at Lawson. "But there's gold there, eh, Syd? Millions and billions, ready to

wash out of the sand. They say nobody knows how much."

"Huh!" grunted the banker. "That Klondike gold'll come high. Things are in a heck of a shape up there from all reports. Men died like flies gettin' over Chilkoot last winter. Five thousand men at Lake Bennett right this minute, waitin' for the ice to break up so they can barge down to Dawson. Ten thousand more mushing up the White Pass. They'll starve in the Klondike. Won't even have a beefsteak. Their gold won't do 'em any good. Let the young bucks gamble their lives if they feel that a way. I'll stay here, drag down my ten per cent, an' watch the circus."

"But Syd'll get there, won't you, Syd?" said Lila proudly. "The weaker ones will fail, but I'm sure you'll win out. It'll be a glorious adventure."

"I'll try it," said Lawson carelessly. "As Mr. Bodine says, it will be a gamble. But it should be rather—er—interesting."

"Even if Syd's an Easterner, he won't be a tenderfoot long," Lila told Rondo. "He used to be on the football team at Princeton."

"Don't embarrass me," Lawson demurred. "This gentleman has won his spurs, in a manner of speaking, in far more primitive pastimes." His bold eyes, resting on Rondo, betrayed a faint twinkle, as though he were extending to the latter an invitation to join him in smiling tolerance of feminine conceit.

"Well," said Banker Bodine at this point, flicking the ashes from his cigar, "if you young folks are going to palaver here I reckon I'll drag inside. The air's a mite nippy for a gent in as poor flesh as me. Syd's got to get used to it if he's going to hit the Klondike Trail. Happy days, Rondo," he leered meaningly at the youth in passing. "Drop around an' see us often. You an' Syd ought to get better acquainted."

With a dry chuckle he waddled away.

"Perhaps we'd better go inside." Lila placed a hand on Lawson's arm. "Won't you come in, too, Rondo?"

"Much obliged," said Rondo. "I'd best drag along. Sorry to bust in on you like this when you had company." His blue eyes, disregarding Lawson, fixed on Lila's face. "See you later, maybe?"

"You mean to-night? I'm afraid not, Ron. Sorry." She smiled up at Lawson in a manner that caused certain muscular bulges to mar Rondo's smooth cheeks. "I've got obligations toward my guest, you know. He's starting North in a day or two, and just think, he might never come back! It wasn't important, was it, Ron?"

Lawson now made a graceful gesture that rendered his puzzling personality still more incomprehensible to Rondo. That it was also somewhat disconcerting to Lila, that it marred a delightful situation in which she was the central figure, was also evident by a tiny frown and a quick look. The debonair youth bowed slightly, with an inclination that included them both.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, and grinned almost boyishly at his use of the Western colloquialism, "I'll drag inside. The gentleman undoubtedly has matters of importance to discuss. I really have no claim on all your time, Lila."

"Oh, no," objected Rondo, "I shouldn't have put it up to you like that. See you some other time, Lila. You were here first, Mr. Lawson"—he grinned upon his rival, but his blue eyes were mirthless—"it's your deal."

But Lawson waved the matter aside, as though the whole incident were of no importance.

"Not at all," he said lightly, "I yield to your prior claims. I really have some matters to discuss with your father," he told Lila. "One must have backing to go to the North, you know, and since the governor cut me off, I must look about for another financial angel for

the venture. Excuse me, and I'll run along and proceed to break the news to him while he's in a genial mood. A pleasure to have met you, Mr. Rondo. See you again, no doubt."

He bowed and strode away. He sauntered by the window within, extracting a silver cigarette case from his waistcoat pocket. Before the fireplace, he lowered himself gracefully to a settee adjacent to an armchair above whose upholstered back projected the banker's bullet head and uptilted cigar.

CHAPTER III.

A LADY'S "PERHAPS."

THE girl moved across the shadowed veranda and seated herself on the broad balustrade. Her smooth, cameo-like features were turned slightly away, and one daintily shod foot tapped on the stone flagging. Rondo stood humbly at her side.

"Sorry to have horned in this way, Lila. It isn't too cold for you here?"

"No," she said, a touch of irritation in her voice. "I'm not cold."

"Lila," he said bluntly, "are you in love with this—this chap Lawson?"

She turned toward him, her hazel eyes smoldering.

"Such a question!" she said, chin upraised. "What is it to you, Mr. Bill Rondo?"

"Plenty." He twisted his sombrero in his hands. "It's got a bearing on my next play."

"Perhaps I am. What then?"

"Then," said Rondo, grinning, "I'll apologize again for busting up your fine effect with Lawson. It'll be so long and good luck, and I'm on my way."

"And if not, what?"

"If not," said Rondo, "I'll recall the important business that fetched me here to-night. I might even remember some lines I've rehearsed, providing I don't just naturally pass out trying to say 'em. You know what I mean, Lila." He spoke gravely and with sudden force "I'm sorry your hostile this a way. A blind man could see you're not in what you might call a receptive mood. It's just a tough break for me. But since I'm here we might as well call a spade a spade an' make the most of it."

He leaned against the pillar, thumbs hooked in his belt. She studied him for a long moment, head erect, petulant lips compressed, noting the gravity of his flushed, boyish features, the steadfastness of his blue eyes. From within the house came a murmur of conversation, her father's gruff voice and Lawson's well-modulated tones.

With a sudden change of mood she smiled and her eyelids drooped. The situation, after all, had certain pleasing aspects.

"There is nothing between Syd and me, Ron," she said softly, and waited.

He relaxed a little, though his gaze remained fixed upon her. A vague surmise suggested that her statement did not carry the weight it should, that she would have been curious as to what he had to say even though something more than mere friendship existed between her and Lawson; and inwardly he condemned himself bitterly for such a thought. Throughout his long association with Lila he had always been troubled by something baffling in her personality that was at odds with his own downright creed. There were certain depths to her character, he told himself, that he had been unable to fathom. The treasonable thought had never occurred to him, since he had first enshrined her upon a pedestal, that perhaps beneath her coquettish, exquisite exterior was nothing more.

She unquestionably was beautiful. He thought he had never before seen her so radiant, so alluring, as at this moment. Her Madonnalike face was upturned, her lips half parted, her eyes downcast. He seated himself beside her, harness creaking, and took her hand.

It was a small hand, white and soft. He squeezed it; and at a gentle returning pressure, a thrill of such proportions shook him that he was sure it caused his spurs to jingle.

"Lila," he said, "I'm not going to use those lines I rehearsed. Forgot 'em, anyway. You've probably got a hunch why I came to-night. I should have gone away when I saw you had company, but it seemed like I'd put it off too long, like I couldn't wait any longer to find out where I stood. When I make up my mind that a way, I crave action."

"So you've made up your mind, have you, Ron?" murmured Lila. "Concerning what, pray?"

"Well," said Rondo, taking a deep breath, "to ask you—well——" He writhed in excruciating embarrassment and coughed. "It's like this, Lila. You and I've known each other for a long time. Ever since I've known you I've been dreaming plenty. For a while I figured I was the luckiest hombre in the world. Because you were—kind to me. Lately, I wasn't so sure. So I decided I'd best find out if—whether I had a chance."

"Chance?" echoed Lila. "What do you mean, Ron?"

"To—to win your respect," said Rondo in a shaken voice, "and your love. I don't amount to much, I know, Lila. But I'd dreamed that some time, maybe, you might—marry me."

Having taken the plunge, in a manner of speaking, he writhed no more, but sat very still, his eyes devouring her face. Had she laughed at this point, at his halting speech or agony of embarrassment, he would have leaped to his feet and strode forthwith from the scene. But she did not laugh. She leaned toward him a little, a smile tugging at her lips, her eyes luminous.

"What is this, Ron?" she inquired softly. "A proposal?"

"Which it shorely is."

"Say it again," she commanded.

"Lila," he said, very gravely indeed, "will you marry me?"

"That's better." She laughed now, and withdrew her hand. "This is so romantic, even though you are so blushing and backward, Ron. Nobody ever proposed to me quite like that before. Listen," she hurried on, as he sat more stiffly erect. "Do you love me a lot—Ron?"

"Of course," said Rondo.

"It's nice," said Lila, "to be loved. I like you, too, Rondo. It was thrilling to dance with you, last fall at the rodeo ball. I was so proud—and we did look so nice together that night, didn't we? Lots of people told me so, and the girls were positively green with envy." She sighed. "But that was a long time ago, Ron. I never knew you cared for me like—like this. I'm sorry. You wouldn't be—your life wouldn't be utterly ruined if—if——"

Though she hesitated, still smiling somewhat expectantly, he said nothing. He merely waited and gripped hard on the unyielding stone of the balustrade.

"Dad—wouldn't like it," she said weakly.

"You're of age, Lila," he reminded her. "If you care for me, we can get along without the O. K. of the Bank of Prineville."

She flushed a little at this challenge. "But you haven't got anything, Ron. It's preposterous."

"I've saved eight hundred dollars," said Rondo. "Which is going some on my fifty and found. There's free land up on Long Creek. Some of the old-timers who know I'm on the square will stake me to some beef. It isn't much of a start, but with you backin' me up, the sky would be the limit."

"Oh, but Ron," she protested, her eyes wide, "surely you wouldn't expect me to go up with you to Long Creek where it's so lonely, and live in a cabin, and do my own cooking, and wash the dishes, and scrub the floors——" She

shivered. "It's ridiculous, Ron. I just couldn't."

"Getting a start is hard that a way," said Rondo doggedly. "But we'd soon be on our feet. Other folks have done it. Nobody handed out on a silver platter the ranches that McNab's got, and Hank Travis, and the rest of these big holdings. Those lads built 'em. They got iron in their system. So have I. And their womenfolks were right alongside, backin' their play."

"You have got iron in you, haven't you, Ron?"

"I may be a dreamer that a way," said Rondo, "but for me that there cabin up on Long Creek would be a castle. With you in it, Lila, there wouldn't be any trails too hard or jack pots too big. I could kick wild cats out of the way and rope a shooting star. Nothin' could stop me."

"My," said Lila softly, "you're almost poetic. If only you weren't so—so poor, Ron, I could learn to care for you a lot. At heart I think you're like a knight of old, in shining armor. That's what you seemed like in the rodeo last fall. You were so romantic and spectacular. But ——" she sighed. "I'm sorry, Ron. I just couldn't make believe up in that cabin on Long Creek. I know the pioneer women did it. But I'm afraid I'm not the pioneer type. It would take too long. There would be years and years before we got on our feet, as you put it. I would be old then. If I worked hard, my hands would be red and rough. Don't you see, Ron? I just couldn't."

He stared at her fixedly through the gloom. For a long moment they sat thus. When he spoke she knew, knowing his ways, that he had forged past some mental crossroads that would terminate this delightfully romantic situation. She did not grasp, at first, the dimensions of the decision he had reached so swiftly.

"I get you," he said. "If I had made a stake already, maybe you'd listen to my romantic ideas. But you don't crave to start at the bottom with me. Being used to gravy, you don't crave the grief. If they was some short cut whereby you could meet up with me where the goin' was easier, maybe you'd trail along. Is that it?"

She flushed a little at this blunt analysis of her point of view. "You—you're making me appear very selfish, Ron——"

"I'm not criticizing you," he cut in. "Maybe you ain't cut out for the pioneer life, at that. Let me put it this way. Suppose I was able to go out and make a considerable stake, pronto. Then, if I come slopin' around and said, 'Look, Lila, I got 'er made! I got capital enough to put a new brand on a regular herd. We can live in a reg'lar house an' start right.' What would you say to that?"

She hesitated and averted his gaze. "How could you do it?" she evaded. "You mean I should wait years and years until you had amassed some capital?"

"Not years. Maybe six months. I'm not saying it can be done. But if I should, what then?"

"Yes, but how?" she persisted. "There's no use discussing something that's impossible."

"It ain't impossible. Your dad gave me an idea when we were talking a while ago, which has shorely grown considerable in the last minnit." He grinned. "It's flatterin' to this said idea to say it's even a long chance. But I'll give it a whirl if I've got a chance with you. Question is, would it be 'yes' or 'no'?"

She strove to read his expression, to fathom the source of the sudden, reckless determination flashing from his blue eyes.

"I would say," she said softly, her gaze fixed on his face, "perhaps."

"Then," said Rondo, sliding from the balustrade to his feet and stooping to

sweep up his sombrero with a gesture that was almost an exultant flourish, "I'm on my way."

"Where?" she demanded, placing a hand on his arm. "Ron, are you going to the Klondike?"

"Maybe. But not to dig gold out of the sand." He spoke enigmatically. His teeth flashed as he grinned again. "I don't know anything about mining, but I shorely know beef. Maybe I'll head North. If you hear folks talkin' about a fool expedition that Rondo's undertook, remember that you said—'perhaps.'"

"Wait!" She followed him to the steps. She was breathing faster in response to a kind of exultant excitement that seemed to vibrate in the very air about him. "You're not fair, Ron. Tell me what this mad thing is you're going to undertake."

"I will," he promised, "when I get this said idea all roped, hog tied, and ready for the iron. First there's a few wild cats I got to kick out of the way. See you later, Lila."

His splendid horse wheeled as he swung to the saddle, pirouetted like a giant toe-dancer, champing at the bit. Rondo waved a farewell as he rode away.

Lila felt thwarted, cheated of the full measure of the dramatics of the situation. Yet, as she entered the softly lighted room where Lawson waited, her eyes were alight and radiant color was in her cheeks. What a splendid evening it had turned out to be! A sense of power thrilled her, of mastery over circumstance and men. Lawson was waiting; Rondo was riding forth on some nameless project at her whim; her "perhaps" had been reward enough.

The banker had retired to his study. Lawson leaned gracefully against the mantel. She moved toward him, smiling.

"He's gone now, Syd," she said tolerantly. "Poor Ron! He's so romantic. Quite a spectacular type, don't you think?"

Lawson's faintly mocking glance noted her flushed cheeks and starry eyes. He flicked the ashes from his cigarette and looked through the north window into the night. Rondo and the buckskin range king, undulating in flight, plunged through the lighted area at the end of the shadowed street and were gone.

"Gad," he breathed, "I'd give an arm to be able to ride like that!"

CHAPTER IV.

RONDO'S DREAM.

THERE was abroad on the frontier in that day and year, a magic word on all lips wherever men foregathered. Its very syllables breathed of mystery, adventure, and the lure of gold. At first it meant merely a nebulous region far up in the arctic fastnesses, a remote land guarded by iron peaks, where the ground never thawed, but where the creek beds were speckled with yellow nuggets, dully gleaming and heavy. There was something suggestive of a nugget in the word itself, the consonants rugged but rounded, having a ring as of true metal. That word was "Klondike."

Other words followed, to take their places as lesser giants of imagination—"Eldorado," "Bonanza." These were names to conjure with. Dawson City became a fabled, roaring metropolis of the North where the medium of exchange was raw gold. Gradually the name of a mighty river, the Yukon, grew to designate the whole rugged treasure-chest empire near the circle. But "Klondike" remained, and was destined to become accepted in future generations, as the symbol of the material realization of prospectors' dreams.

Out of the North the challenge had come, the fall before, echoing like a bugle call across the adventurous world. Earlier reports had filtered down, but

these were nebulous, fantastic, and lacking authority. Confirmation came in '97; adventurous ones grasped the fact that placer deposits of untold wealth were waiting at the junction of Eldorado and Bonanza Creeks; steamship companies boomed the find, each steamer returning from Alaska bringing new data on the staggering dimensions of the strike, and in far frontier camps men cast their tools aside, and diggings were deserted as the army started for the North.

Thereafter, on a terrific scale, was reenacted the grim and ancient drama that follows the scramble for gold. In the fall of '97, the advance guard of the stampede were laboring like madmen unscrambling the chaos of equipment unloaded at Dyea Beach. With no adequate realization of the hundreds of miles intervening between themselves and the Yukon—representing the harshest environment on the continent—thousands that fall started for the interior, battling doggedly onward even after snow and ice had choked the majesty of Chilkoot Pass. Of these, many died on the trail, many turned back, and the majority of those who reached Lake Bennett, headquarters of the Yukon, found the waterway to Dawson not only frozen but also impassable.

It is estimated that five thousand men wintered on the bleak shores of Bennett waiting for the spring break-up. Those who survived that all but unrecorded chapter in the history of the Klondike formed the advance guard for the greatest gold stampede of history. Skagway was then the outpost of the wilderness, and from that point the following year twenty thousand men mounted the weary trail up the White Pass, crossed the barren lake country, and descended by raft, barge, canvas canoe, and flimsy whip-sawed boat through the savage currents of Miles Canyon, White Horse, Thirty Mile, and Five Finger Rapids, and so down the Yukon to Dawson.

Such was the Trail of '98; and what tragedies lined that trail, what heartbreak, discouragement, despair and death walked in step with the weary army could be but sketchily suggested by a battalion of historians; for the story of each adventurer who reached Dawson was an epic in itself.

Rondo, in common with other youths of the high desert, was thoroughly familiar with all known data on the Klondike. The great stampede was the sole and absorbing topic of the day. Each fragment of news filtering back from the North was seized upon and analyzed to the slightest detail. Conjecture and alleged authority were passed on as fact; bizarre rumor was afloat concerning all phases of the strike; and at hitching rail, bar and chuck-wagon fire the magic word and lesser giants of imagination passed in review.

It was the spring of '98. Stampede history was in the making. For months past, Rondo, in common with other more discerning youths of the Crooked River, had inwardly been battling the insidious luring call from the North. Tales of frowning Chilkoot, of thousands swarming up the terrific White Pass, of the danger, privation, and death that stalked the trail, represented merely an additional challenge; for to counterbalance this side of the picture came more staggering reports of the dimensions of the find at Klondike.

Many answered the challenge. Vacancies appeared on more than one ranch pay roll as reckless ones rode forth from Prineville and were seen no more. Familiar faces were missing from bar and chuck wagon, and when questions were asked, no spoken word was necessary, so common was the mute answer of a thumb jerked significantly toward the North.

With Rondo, the battle had been be-

tween cold, sober judgment and the unreasoning, all but overpowering, call to adventure. His unemotional judgment had told him that he was a top hand in a hard school; but that school was riding, not mining for placer gold. His reason appraised the mathematical chances of those risking their all on the Yukon trail; of the thousands converging on the Klondike from all points of the compass, it was inevitable that but a few would find gold. His life and training, his every expert knowledge, was of the range; to join a gold stampede of any dimensions was sheer folly. And as he reasoned thus, he listened avidly to reports from the North; and cursed himself inwardly for the very ability to reason that was holding him back.

But now, as he rode from the Bodine mansion toward the bright lights of the range metropolis, it was as one who has cast off chains. Lila's "perhaps," plus an unwitting remark in the sardonic conversation of the banker, had broken down barriers his reason had built against the adventurous call. It was more than an idea that had come to him, as he had sat silently appraising Lila's reaction to his proposal; it had been an inspiration, vivid, breath-taking, that had leaped into his mind. By a single bold stroke he could capitalize upon his range training, make a desperate bid for the "stake" Lila required before she would listen to his further advances. It was a long chance, he knew; but through the traditions of the frontier strode the triumphant shades of many long-chance winners. Odds of any measurable dimensions was all he asked.

Thus, as he rode, his blue eyes were alight and his exultant grin was that of one set free. He had affected a compromise with reason and was on his way. He told himself that he was embarking upon a desperate venture solely for Lila's sake; but deep within him he knew that he made a compromise with a stronger urge. Should his plans prevail, he would yet see Dawson. Others would wash the gold from Bonanza and Eldorado; but he would stand, thumbs hooked in belt, and mark the gleam of the nuggets in the pan; and in years to come, when others of a rugged fraternity foregathered, he, also, would be qualified to say, "Klondike? Yes—I was there."

He left his horse at the hitching rail before Dillon's Place, largest and most popular of the palaces of refreshment and chance that stood shoulder to shoulder along the main thoroughfare, and strode inside.

The noisy and glittering rendezvous was crowded at the moment. Here colorfully garbed youths rubbed shoulders with plainly dressed owners of unmortgaged empires. There was the shuffle of booted feet in the sawdust, the clink of glasses, the unending roar of boisterous conversation; and upon the air, blue with tobacco smoke, was the odor of strong liquor.

Acquaintances bellowed genially at Rondo, pounced upon him, and dragged him to the bar. He drank with them, ordered up another round; but as he toyed with his glass, his blue eyes swept the room. It was not his thought to dally at the bar. An urge greater than mere thirst was upon him. He studied the faces of old-timers about him, weighing their potentialities swiftly and passing on.

He left the grinning group and moved toward the rear of the saloon. From this point, through an arched doorway, came a more subdued and tense hum of conversation against a background of other sounds—the rattle of poker chips, the riffling of cards, the unemotional voices of dealers calling the bets. Into this temple of chance Rondo entered. He stood, thumbs hooked in his belt, and surveyed the room.

His glance rested on the bearded features of Hank Travis. The cattle baron

of the lower Long Creek towered above a group gathered about the "21" table. He was a bluff, booming man, ponderous of bulk, with a black, knowing eye. He was not gambling at the moment. He stood, huge feet firmly planted, watching the ebb and flow of the game before him.

Rondo considered Hank Travis. The bulky one's jovial manner, he knew, covered the cold, calculating instincts of the gambler, just as the black, luxuriant beard which crept high on his swarthy cheek-bones concealed a stubborn jaw. He was a man of substance in the high desert, controlling a vast area of range heavily populated with good beef bearing the Travis brand. His holdings had been built up not only through sheer determination and the will to triumph over a harsh environment, but also through a species of luck, the gambler's ability to pick the winning play. He had lost much, but he had won more.

It was this latter thought that decided Rondo. Here, he felt, was the man he sought. There were other cattlemen to whom he might broach his proposition, men whose confidence he held; but confidence alone was not sufficient. Travis had himself played long chances; and the sheer audacity of the project might possibly appeal to his gambler's instinct.

He strode forward, mentally laying hold on all his resources to meet this first crisis; for it must be a selling talk of no mean proportions that would fire even Travis' bold imagination.

At first the cattle baron paid no heed to the youth at his side. Then, the dealer having drawn one card too many, "went broke" to the edification of both players and spectators. As he unemotionally paid all bets, Travis relaxed, grinned about the circle, and beamed down at Rondo.

"The house is gettin' nicked," he chuckled. "It shorely hurts to watch it. Get on an' ride, cowboy."

"It's gravy for you, too," retorted Rondo. "Wade in it."

"I've done shot my percentage for to-night." The bulky one's tones were jovial. "The said tide done turned too late, leavin' me broke and flatter'n a hotcake in distress. But it shorely does me good to see some of these other pilgrims raidin' the bank this a way. What's on yore mind, young feller?"

"If you ain't going to play for a minute or two, let's ease over to the sidelines for a second," said Rondo.

"A feller's a dang fool to buck a game like that there blackjack," growled Travis as he followed the youth to a vacant table. "All stand-offs go to the house, which is too much of an edge. I reckon I'll confine my activities to poker hereafter. When you drag the house's ante out of the winnin' pot, it don't hurt nobody's feelin's."

Had Rondo been less blinded by his enthusiasm, he might have paused at this moment, deeming Travis to be not in the proper mood. Not only had the bulky one's words revealed that his was the granitelike stamina of soul which could set a limit for an evening's play and abide by it even though the tide of fortune had turned against the "house," but he had lost that limit. This would be a matter of secret and somber irritation, though cloaked by a jovial manner. Also that portion of Travis' features not protected by hirsuit growth was darkly ruddy, his eyes glowed beneath shaggy brows, and his breath was clinching proof that before his night's limit had crossed the green-topped table, he had quaffed oft at the flowing bowl.

This combination of circumstances would have given Rondo pause, had he analyzed them. One who played a limit was not the habitual long-chance plunger he deemed necessary for his plans. Also, when Travis was somewhat under the influence of liquor, it was notorious that the joviality covering a certain harshness of manner sometimes discon-

certing to those whose opinions were at variance with his own became an even thinner veneer.

But Rondo's analytical judgment was colored by his inner exultance. It seemed inconceivable that Travis should fail to kindle before the fire of his own enthusiasm.

They seated themselves at the table. The cattle baron sprawled in his chair and fixed black, sardonic eyes on the flushed, eager face of the youth.

"It's about this Klondike business." Rondo plunged into the subject with characteristic bluntness. "I've got a deal all figgered, but I need a gent of your equipment to back my play. You've heard how things are going up North. This summer will see the biggest stampede in history, from all reports. There's thousands of men waiting at Lake Bennett for the ice to break up in the river, which won't be for another month. Thousands more are mushing up from Skagway. Before fall, Dawson will be considerable of a village—ten, fifteen, maybe twenty thousand. Men, Hank, twenty thousand hairy-chested hombres—who've got to eat."

"Sure they got to eat," the cattleman agreed, plucking at his beard. "What of it?"

"Listen, Hank"—Rondo leaned forward impressively and tapped the other's broad knee—"picture Dawson by the middle of summer. Or by fall. Turn loose yore imagination on it. A roarin' mining camp on the banks of the Yukon. Shacks built out of lumber sawed by hand. Tents which fellers has carried in on their backs. It's four hundred miles inland, an' every stitch of clothes them hombres wear, every drop of liquor they got to drink, every bit of grub in which they can sink their teeth, is freighted in from Skagway. What's the answer? Ain't some going hungry? Yeah, an' all the gold in the world right there at hand, an' nothin' to buy with it!"

"Sounds reasonable," admitted the cattleman. "But seems like I had an idea they could ship stuff by boat to Dawson."

"Not before late in the summer. It's a thousand miles to Dawson from the mouth of the Yukon. They got to wait for the ice. Even then"—he spoke significantly—"they won't fetch in no fresh meat."

"Fresh meat?" echoed the cattleman. "They's moose an' caribou up in that blasted wilderness, ain't they?"

"Yeah," said Rondo, "but that truck won't take the place of beefsteak. Particularly in the richest mining town on earth. You begin to get my idea, Hank?"

"I don't," Hank growled. "Shoot the works. What's yore play?"

"Just this." Rondo looked about him and lowered his voice to a whisper. "I aim to take a hundred prime steers, ship 'em North, unload 'em somewhere near Skagway, and personally escort that said beef to Dawson."

"On the hoof?" Hank questioned incredulously.

"On the hoof," said Rondo.

"Son of a gun!" Hank breathed. "An' where do you figger me in on the deal?"

"Cinch," said Rondo, grinning. "I ain't got the hundred steers."

CHAPTER V.

A BLUFF IS CALLED.

THE cattleman stared, with a species of ludicrous amazement. His bearded features swelled with inner emotion as his agile mind grasped the startling proposal. Rondo, eying him unwinkingly, was troubled by a vague premonition that grief lay ahead.

"Cowboy," inquired the cattle baron, at length, "you ain't been drinkin' heavy?"

Rondo shook his head.

"Nor you ain't been kicked by a hoss

recent? Or fallen down no stairs, lightin' on yore head?" He spoke gravely. "Subject to dizzy spells?"

"Travis," said Rondo, his flush deepening, "I've put this proposition up to you. If you don't cotton to it, that's yore business. It shorely don't call for no humorous remarks."

"Tut, tut," admonished the cattleman reprovingly, wagging his head, "don't you get hostile that a way before we get to the bottom of this business. As the proud daddy of this haywire idea, get set to answer a polite question or two."

"Shoot," said Rondo, between his teeth. "But don't you leave yourself be troubled by any notion that I'm tryin' to rope you into something, Hank. I'm admittin' it's a hundred-to-one shot. If you don't like the looks of it, just leave it lay."

"Now then," said the bulky one with studious gravity, "let's examine this A-1, twenty-four carat, superheated hunch in a businesslike way in which they ain't none of this said distressin' humor. This is the layout. You aim to take these hundred steers to Alasky, unload 'em somewheres near Skagway, and drive 'em to the Yukon. What you goin' to feed the critters on the trail?"

"Grass," said Rondo. "That country ain't covered with ice an' snow in the summer."

"Grass?" queried the cattleman politely. "On the White Pass? Seems like I heard they was the bones of a thousand hosses lyin' between Skagway an' the Summit."

"We won't go up the White Pass," said Rondo. "We'll go over some inland route, a longer ways around, and hit the Yukon somewhere below them lakes."

"An' after you hit the Yukon, what?"

"Barges," said Rondo shortly. "We'll build some barges and raft 'em down to Dawson."

"Sounds easy. An' when you get them steers to Dawson—when you get 'em there, you savvy, after blazin' a trail somewheres over them blasted mountains where they's grass aplenty, an' hittin' the Yukon somewheres below Lake What-you-call-'em, and throwin' together a couple of rafts which will hold up fifty steers apiece, an' so forth—then you figger that all them steers, which will be in good flesh an' not a one missin', will fetch you maybe better than the market here. Is that it?"

"Better than the market?" echoed Rondo. "Three, four times better. It'll be the only beef in the Yukon."

The cattleman nodded, his black eyes twinkling.

"They's no argument there, I reckon. Gettin' 'em to Dawson is the joker. But that's one of them mere details, so we'll let it pass. Whereas, it suggests another little detail which is some interestin'. On what basis do you figger me antein' them steers?"

"Any way you like," said Rondo shortly. "A cut on the profits. Or if you don't crave to gamble on what they'll fetch in Dawson, I'll guarantee you better than the market."

"Now we're gettin' down to brass tacks," murmured the bulky one. "Say the goin' value of prime steers on the hoof hereabouts is thirty dollars. You got three thousand iron men?"

"No," said Rondo, flushing. "If you don't crave to sit in, I'll give you my note bearing the goin' rate of ten per cent."

"H'm," said the cattleman. "Your note, huh? I can see you've thought of everything. An' supposin' you lose them steers somewhere in the two-thousand-odd- miles between here an' Dawson, who pays the said note?"

"I do," said Rondo. "That's my gamble. I'll come back an' work it out if it takes ten years."

It required no sixth sense to inform Rondo that he had failed to kindle the hard-bitten cattleman's enthusiasm.

Throughout the cross-examination, he had resented bitterly the semifacetious, tolerant attitude of the older man. It had been with difficulty that he had restrained himself from terminating the interview abruptly and striding forth to seek an audience elsewhere. Now, armed though he was by the knowledge that he had misjudged the other's attitude, the cattleman's ruthless emotional reaction caught him unprepared.

The bulky one's black eyes, fixed upon him, seemed positively to bulge. He stiffened in his chair. He threw back his head and he laughed, a joyous, sardonic, gleeful bellow that seemed to shake the very walls.

At distant gaming tables, faces turned in that direction. Dealers paused, their cold eyes questioning. Spectators not engaged in play moved toward the source of that colossal laughter, chuckling in anticipation. Rondo gripped hard on his chair, and while rage, chagrin, and humiliation shook him in successive waves, Travis roared again, flinging a great arm aloft in an inviting gesture.

"Listen, you big monument," said Rondo between his teeth, "this here's confidential. Laugh if you feel that a way, but don't drag in the whole popeyed world."

But the bulky one utterly disregarded his plea.

"Gather round, wolves," he proclaimed, wiping his eyes. "Draw near and unfold yore ears. Ho, this is shorely good!"

A grinning circle swiftly hemmed them in. The moisture burst out on Rondo's forehead. Travis had an audience. His ruthless nature, having appraised and brushed aside the proposal, had yielded to the impulse to present the intriguing and ingenuous aspects of the situation to the world. This, Rondo knew, would be fatal to his plans. With the project held up to public ridicule, any further attempt to secure backing would be of no avail. But he was powerless to prevent the crisis. Nothing short of murder could stop Travis now.

Like an animal entrapped, Rondo peered about the circle. The final touch to the picture that hurled him to bitter depths, the last straw, as it were, was the fact that the gaunt and hawklike features of his own employer, McNab, loomed above the crowd. To have that dour Scot, whom he held in high esteem, witness his public humiliation, was torturing.

"Citizens," boomed Travis, "all ain't lost by any means. It ain't as bad as it looks. In this vale of tears they's a gleam through the mist, a beacon light shinin' through the black an' stormy night. An' how come? Because in these depressin', troublous times we still got in our midst a young, upstandin', rosy-cheeked bozo in whom that said hope springs eternal, who figgers they's shorely a Santa Claus, an' them distant pastures is always green. Bill Rondo, gents. Look him over. He ain't the lowly cowboy to whom you're accustomed. He's a blasted bull snake who's thrown off his scales. A seer of rosy-tinted visions, a dreamer of haywire dreams.

"But this ain't any ordinary, two-by-four, picayune dream that's gotten him down." The tormentor's bellow was gleeful. "It's a nightmare's foal! You thoughtful citizens crave to know the earmarks of this inspired hunch he unloosed on me when I was unsuspectin' that a way? The ayes have it. Get a holt of yourselves, gents, an' hang on!"

While Rondo sat rigid beneath the deluge of ruthless forensics, the bulky one, in an utterly disrespectful and gleeful manner, pounced upon his cherished project, magnified its obvious weaknesses, reduced its chances of success to a vanishing minimum, and swept it gleefully from the realm of reasonable things.

Grinning faces peered down at Rondo, marking his torture, seeming almost to lick their lips with anticipation. Deseperately he tried to stem the tide of searing rhetoric, but the bulky man roared him down, drowned out his protests by sheer weight of words.

"An' that ain't all of it," bellowed Travis. "No, citizens, the half ain't been told. You know what this rosy-cheeked young feller-me-lad had up his sleeve all the while? He wasn't aimin' to amuse pore ol' Hank Travis, who's got to get his laugh out of life as he goes along. No, indeed. As serious as a blasted bull owl in the dark of the moon he says to me, 'Hank,' he says, 'all I need to cash in on this gilt-edge idea I got don't amount to much. Just a hundred steers, that's all,' he says. Simple, ain't it, citizens? He's got the idea. I got the steers. Why can't we get together? Ho"—the big man guffawed, holding his sides—"it busts me in two! I've seen 'em all, some good, some bad. But this here's one of them superheated layouts which would make tears stream from the eyes of a bald-faced bull!"

Rondo was cut to the heart. Had the bulky one rejected his proposal he would not have been in the least disheartened. There were others in the region who might have considered even such a hazardous undertaking. But a fiendish whim of the inflamed cattleman had led him, in violation of common decency, to reveal their confidential discussion to the world at large, and in a manner calculated to place the project forever beyond the pale. Men were like cattle, he knew; a blatant leader could set the pace for the herd. Good judgment was most easily swayed by ridicule.

In the grinning faces about him, unless he acted swiftly, he read doom for his hopes. His dream would be a joke. Within an hour the matter would be common property, to be reviewed chucklingly before all the bars of Prineville, which were also the bars of public opinion. It would spread throughout the cattle country and form the subject of unendurable twitting and alleged witticisms.

The crowd waited, grinning, for his reaction. He strove to speak, to defend his position. He knew that the tide was against him, that whatever he said or did would merely add to his humiliation. He sat livid, fists clenched, eyes blazing, but rage and chagrin choked his utterance.

The end was not yet. The chuckling crowd shifted split apart. Rondo writhed anew with the realization that McNab, his gaunt employer, was at his side. He could not bear to look up. He sat rigid, and because the sparing words of the unsmiling owner of the McNab brand carried weight in the cattle country, the spectators also waited tensely. This, unquestionably, would be good.

But when McNab spoke, the grins on the circle of faces became fixed. Travis' great bulk stiffened, and within Rondo was released a wave of surging emotion that shook him to the finger tips.

"Travis," said McNab thoughtfully, "it's my opinion that you're an ass."

"Who says so?" bellowed Travis, bounding to his feet.

"I do!" Rondo likewise leaped up, and spat on his hands. It was as though, with a lone voice lifted in his behalf, pent-up exultant forces roared within him. "Boss, much obliged. All the while I've been lookin' for the right word. Travis, you're an ass."

"Wait, laddie." McNab laid a restraining hand on Rondo's arm. "I did not advance this opinion to start a riot. Let us consider the matter as reasonable men."

"They ain't nothin' reasonable about callin' me names," blustered Travis. "That's what I crave action on."

"I can prove it," said McNab, stroking his lean jaw with a thoughtful

gravity that convulsed the spectators. "I do not mean to insult you, of course. An appraisal of a gentleman's mentality is no reflection on his character. I have listened to the details of Rondo's proposition as you have presented it for the benefit of these good people. Your manner in making the matter public, and your attempt to belittle this estimable young man, makes my expressed opinion quite charitable."

Rondo sensed almost unbelievingly that the tide of public ridicule had been checked. A moment before it was as though he stood with his back to the wall, facing the firing squad. Now McNab, championing his cause, dominated the scene. The spectators had chuckled with Travis, with unconscious cruelty had marked Rondo writhe beneath his gibes. Now they were not so sure. With a person of McNab's standing taking up the cudgels in its behalf, the proposition might have merit, after all.

Nor were the spectators impressed by Travis' show of resentment. An outsider might have believed that the mild-mannered McNab was seeking to avoid physical conflict. But in the valley of the Crooked River it was known that on the few occasions when the gaunt and thoughtful Scot had become imbroiled in public differences of opinion, or had invited himself to participate therein, it had required the assistance of most of the able-bodied men of the vicinity to disentangled the resulting mêlée.

The blustering Travis knew this, too; and having "saved his face," in a manner, by showing his resentment, he now hastened to call what he believed to be McNab's bluff.

"Yeah?" he sneered. "An' is they concealed somewheres in yore thoughtful words the idea that maybe Rondo's pipe dream is a gilt-edge humdinger on wheels? You figger he could drive that beef to Dawson?"

"It would be a venture of some risk," McNab admitted. "But it is neither as fantastic or as humorous as you have suggested. I have occasion to know that the young man understands very thoroughly the handling of cattle. If it can be done, it is my opinion that he can do it."

Travis grinned, his eyes gloating and triumphant. He planted himself squarely, thumbs hooked in his belt, and rolled a knowing glance about the circle.

"Now," he said, "we're shorely gettin' down to brass tacks. If you're a gent who's in the habit of bolsterin' up his opinion with something more than talk —which is a low-priced commodity in these parts—just you answer this question, McNab." He spoke slowly and significantly. "You ready to back Rondo's proposition?"

It was the challenge direct. The crowd waited, breathless; for the cautiousness and close-fistedness of the gaunt Scot were notorious. But to their amazement, and to the stupefaction of the bulky Travis, McNab nodded.

"Why, yes," he said, as though the matter were not of great moment, "I would back it up. If given the opportunity," he added, his deep-set eyes twinkling as they rested on Rondo. "For some reason or another, the proposal has not been submitted to me."

Rondo was stunned by this development. The moral support of his grim and hard-bitten employer was more than he had hoped for; to have him state thus casually that he would back the enterprise was overwhelming. He blushed, stammered, could find no words; and the crowd eyed him, grinning, enjoying hugely the dramatics of the situation.

"You mean," breathed Travis, "that you're ready to ante up one hundred steers? Three thousand dollars' worth of beef? This is shorely good!"

"You forget," McNab reminded him, "that the enterprise presents unusual aspects only to you, Travis. I do not say that this is a legitimate business

venture. But Rondo is assuming the risk, and I am willing to give him a chance. I will sell him the steers, taking his note in payment. If he is successful, he can take up the note. If he fails, he can return and work it out. Is that satisfactory to you, Rondo?"

"Which it shorely is," said Rondo exultantly. "That's the precise deal I put up to Travis."

"On that basis," continued McNab, fixing a gloomy eye on the disgruntled Travis, "there is only one risk involved, and that is whether or not Rondo will return from the Yukon alive. I believe he will. Outside of that, he is taking all the chances. So, for the enlightenment of these good people, Travis, will you explain to us any further details that appeal to you as humorous?"

The bulky one squirmed, hung his head, and looked about him with such a furtive and sheepish air that the spectators roared. The tables had been turned with a vengeance. Rondo stood, triumphant, arms folded. McNab towered at his side, thoughtfully stroking his lean jaw; and because the gaunt one had spoken, Rondo knew that all the invisible forces of public opinion that can make or break the affairs of men were arrayed behind him. It was Travis now who stood alone.

The bulky cattleman extricated himself from his dilemma through the sole means, according to the custom of the high desert, remaining at his disposal.

"Slide up to the bar, wolves," he growled, "the drinks is on me."

The tension relieved, the spectators swarmed from the gambling hall and arrayed themselves, chuckling, at the bar. Rondo was at McNab's shoulder, and as glasses were raised in bizarre toasts peculiar to the cattle country, he met the older man's gaze squarely.

"Boss," he said, under cover of the genial uproar about them, "much obliged. You shorely saved my scalp."

"Laddie," said McNab gravely, "it was not merely a whim of the moment, as it may have appeared. Nor was I indulging a gambler's instinct whose presence you may never have suspected. But I felt that I owed it to you, and when Travis made himself so obnoxious I was happy to oblige."

Rondo stared at him, puzzled.

"You may have forgotten an incident that occurred a year ago last winter." Momentarily the gaunt McNab seemed faintly self-conscious. "But it is not my habit to forget. I am referring to that blizzard that caught the herd up above Needles. 'Slim' had his feet frozen, you recall, and 'Curly' lost his horse in the stampede, and was saved only by the fact that he made it on foot to the ranger cabin where Slim was. But you stayed with the herd, held them in the canyon until the storm was over, and brought them in."

"Shucks," said Rondo, embarrassed in his turn. "That didn't amount to nothin'. It was part of my job."

"There were nine hundred head in the storm that night," said McNab. "Most of them would have been lost if they had scattered in the brakes. One hundred is only a part of the beef you saved for me. But let's consider that phase of it closed, laddie." He drained his glass and set it down. "You are ready to proceed, eh?"

"Boss," said Rondo, grinning, "I'm glory bound. One large-size spittin' wild cat has done been kicked out of the way."

"Let us retire to a more secluded corner," said McNab, "where we can conclude certain details of the venture."

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNWELCOME RETAINER.

ON uptilted chairs in a corner of the saloon that represented a sort of quiet eddy in the swirl and din about them, the pair plunged into a discussion of the now full-fledged project. Rondo

was flushed and exultant, his blue eyes beneath the lowered brim of his sombrero revealing the inward swelling triumph of one whom fate has permitted to take the first full step along an adventurous trail. McNab's air was that of a tolerant, somewhat wistful, spectator of unfolding events in which, through age and cautious habit, he was denied a part.

"I suspect, laddie," he said, bending a thoughtful gaze upon the youth, "that since I heard nothing of this undertaking before you left the ranch to-night, the idea came to you somewhat on the spur of the moment. You haven't thought out your entire plan of procedure, eh?"

"Nothin' but the general lay-out," Rondo confessed. "Gettin' the beef was the first divide that had to be crossed."

"Let us dispose of that detail now," said McNab. "On what basis did you propose to take the steers?"

"You name it, boss. It's yore beef. I figgered I could guarantee you the market price, plus whatever cut on the profits you think is right. Providin'" —he grinned—"that I get them mavericks to Dawson."

"No," said McNab. "Since you are taking all the risks, you are entitled to the rewards in the event that you are successful. On the other hand, I am entitled to receive whatever the beef would bring in the open market. Let us put it this way. You may give me your note for three thousand dollars, which is approximately the value of the average run of prime animals on the hoof, bearing the current rate of interest. But with this understanding: If you fail to reach the Klondike, I will accept, in satisfaction of the note, whatever the lowest market value of the hundred steers has been while you are away. If you are successful, you will pay me the highest Portland market price while you are gone. Is that fair?"

"Not for you it ain't," protested Rondo. "It's practically a gift for me. I'm gambling on yore beef."

"The best market price is all I could expect if I disposed of the steers through the regular channels," McNab pointed out.

"But suppose I get in some jack pot up on the trail an' pass out with the herd? They'd be nobody to pay the note."

"That," said McNab, with finality, "is a chance I am prepared to take. It was less than your gamble when you brought the herd in from Needles. We are agreed on that basis, then. Now, laddie, how do you propose to proceed, and when?"

"Immediately," said Rondo, grinning. "Forthwith. *Muy* pronto." He was fairly trembling with suppressed eagerness. He looked about him and lowered his restless feet to the floor. "Boss, I reckon I'll drag along to the ranch an' do some hefty figgerin' where they ain't so many diversions. Right now, all the plan I got is a kind of skeleton which shorely needs some flesh on it. I got to drive the steers to The Dalles, ship 'em by rail to Seattle, by boat to Alaska, an' haze 'em over four hundred miles of hostile trail to Dawson. That's all I know right now. But gosh, I got to get an outfit together! I got to hire a couple of lads to trail with me clean to the Yukon. I got to get a lot of assorted information on the North. Son of a gun"—he smote his hands together—"I got to get busy."

"Now, now," soothed McNab, "you must proceed cautiously, laddie. The success of your venture will rest upon the care with which you make preparations." Nevertheless, his own deep-set eyes reflected something of the other's burning excitement. "I believe I will ride back to the ranch with you, Rondo. Planning with you on your expedition will hold more interest for me than the profitless pastimes of the evening here. Let's go."

As they strode through the milling crowds and emerged upon the street, there was ample evidence that news of the proposed expedition had already permeated the range metropolis. Heavy hands smote Rondo upon the back in passing. Genial voices chuckled in his ear. The realization came to him that in the twinkling of an eye, almost, his status in the high desert had changed. He was no longer merely a lowly buckaroo on a pay roll, but a person of importance. He was a dreamer of adventurous dreams—who was backed by McNab. As he grinned self-deprecatorily and made retort to the half-envious, facetious witticisms hurled upon him, he held fast to the humble knowledge that the silent, gaunt figure at his side was the force that had made the public emulation possible.

"To-morrow is Sunday," McNab reminded him, as they mounted and proceeded slowly down the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare. "You will not be able to purchase supplies or equipment until Monday. Meanwhile, you will have plenty to do. As you know, I am not one who is in favor of much activity on the Sabbath, but because you are pressed for time, I have no objection to your taking the boys and doing what you can at the ranch. You may cut out the steers and hold them in one of the feed lots. You can get the chuck wagon in shape for the drive to The Dalles, and assemble your outfit. Whatever equipment you may need from the ranch is at your disposal."

"Boss," said Rondo contritely, "you're shorely going the limit. This business is going to bust into your arrangements plenty. I'm quittin' the pay roll cold, an' takin' part of yore beef with me. Not to mention the equipment I'm borrowing to do it with."

"We'll make a note of it all," said McNab carelessly. "It will be part of the gamble."

Before they reached the end of the street, a considerable commotion broke out in the rear. Several gorgeous-hued riders were thundering after them, at a speed in violation of the ordinances of the city of Prineville. In the lead was a red-headed youth, one "Rusty" Blades, reckless buckaroo from the Bar-Y Ranch east of the valley.

"One side, cowboys," admonished this rider as the cavalcade bore down upon the pair and their plunging horses hemmed them in, "it's my deal. I got here first."

"Who says so?" demanded another, aggrieved, "I thought of it first, but I done made the mistake of breathin' it aloud, an' you polecats tromped me down sprintin' to your hosses."

"It's a dead heat," proclaimed a sagacious youth who had brought up the rear. "You tell 'im, Rusty, an' don't play no favorites."

"Dead heat!" said the outraged Rusty. "You wasn't even in the money! I'm the gent——"

"It's no contest, boys," Rondo grinned. "Whatever it is, let's have it, Rusty. What you wranglers got on yore minds, if any?"

"It's this a way, Rondo," said Rusty. His bold eyes were alight. "It's done come to our attention that you're aimin' to take a hundred steers an' personally escort this said beef to the Klondike. Now then, for that said jaunt you got to have an extra hand or two to chamber-maid them persnikety steers, an' this aggregation of stalwart citizens is makin' the claim that from among us you can pick the precise hombre you need on yore pay roll. Some of these bull snakes ain't so good." He rolled a disapproving eye over his cohorts and tilted his own sombrero at a rakish angle. "Now, me, I figger the gent you name had shorely ought to be red-headed."

Roars of protest greeted this last statement. Rondo raised a restraining hand.

"I got to have an extra hand or two, boys," he admitted, "but I haven't got that far along in the deal. I'll keep you all in mind. It ain't any picnic, you understand. The gents I'll need will have to be nine tenths wild cat an' the balance composed of equal parts of rawhide an' dynamite. He'll have to live on hopes, an' sleep on rocks, an' tighten his belt at mealtime. He's got to have tufts on his ears an' thumbs on his feet. Yeah, an' growl in his sleep! That said equipment will give him one chance in ten of trailin' in to Dawson—providin' we get all the breaks."

"That's the layout we're thirstin' for," stated Rusty. "An' you couldn't have named our specifications no better."

"I'll keep you all in mind," Rondo promised. "I'll let you know."

As they rode away, he was inwardly thrilled at the realization that beneath their facetious manner was a burning eagerness to join forces with him, that the very recklessness of the enterprise had caught their imagination and brought them flocking to his standard.

As they rode slowly past a certain corner, Rondo looked down the shaded street toward the Bodine mansion. He mastered a sudden, almost overpowering yearning to rush again into Lila's presence, tell her his plans, and mark her inevitable and heart-warming reaction. It would be best to wait, he decided, until he was ready to go. Common report of the project would reach her ears, and she would know, without being told, that she herself had been the inspiration. In imagination he was already picturing her pride and delight; her parting good wishes would strengthen his arm.

Pacing the board walk between the corner and the Bodine house he saw a short, bulky figure and the red glow of a cigar. Even through the gloom he knew who it was. McNab recognized the figure, too, and pulled up.

"Yon's the banker, Rondo," he said, "taking an evening stroll and pondering, no doubt, his heavy financial affairs. Which suggests, laddie, a phase of your problem concerning which I have been doing some thinking. Have you formed an estimate of how much your expedition will cost? How much capital have you got?"

"Eight hundred dollars," said Rondo, with some pride. "I figgered maybe I could borrow a little more somewheres to put with it."

"It will require more than a little," said McNab. "At a rough guess I should say you'll need close to three thousand."

"Three thousand!" echoed Rondo, aghast.

"You have not had much experience in shipping cattle," said McNab. "It will cost you perhaps three hundred to get them to Seattle. You have overlooked the fact that rates to Alaska at the peak of the gold rush will be high. You have probably not given serious thought to how much your supplies and equipment for yourself and extra hands for a two or perhaps three months' overland trip will require. A substantial cash outlay will be necessary."

"You're right," Rondo agreed, somewhat staggered at the prospect. "That's a part of the hefty figgerin' I hadn't got to yet."

"Unfortunately," continued McNab, "it happens that all my resources are tied up at present. I am reasonably certain that no individual in the valley would make the necessary advance. To hazard beef is one thing, but to gamble with cash is another. Money is hard to get, except from the bank." He lowered his voice and indicated Banker Bodine, who was approaching slowly through the gloom. "That gentleman yonder is shrewd and far-sighted. He might be persuaded to do something for you."

"Not so good," demurred Rondo, pulling his hat lower over his eyes. "I don't want to be in his debt whatsoever."

"Tut, tut," McNab brushed his objections aside. "This is strictly business. You will not be in his debt, because the gentleman will make no loan unless he deems it to his interest. I will broach the subject to him, laddie. You need the money, eh? This is probably the only place you can get it. I am a good customer for his bank, and he will perhaps listen to me with more tolerance."

Though he strove to look upon it from McNab's point of view, namely, that it was a business proposal in which personalities should not enter, Rondo's pride rebelled at the thought of asking even a business favor of Lila's sardonic and implacable father. He would have objected further, but the banker was now within earshot.

The money baron eyed the waiting pair with somber curiosity as he drew near, and nodded a curt greeting. He was muffled in a greatcoat, and a soft hat was pulled low over his bullet head.

"Takin' a little constitutional before turning in," he vouchsafed. "Lila's got company, an' the chattering of them young ones drove me out of doors. Air's a mite nippy, ain't it?"

"Mr. Bodine," said McNab, plunging forthwith into the subject, "sorry to trouble you with business matters outside of banking hours. But Rondo here is engaged in an enterprise that may need some financial backing. If you do not object, I will outline the situation for your benefit."

"I've heard about it," said the banker. "You mean takin' the beef to the Klondike? Hank Travis rode by here a spell ago, and gave me the details. Young man, you've got imagination, at least." His gimlet eyes, fixed on Rondo, might have revealed either amusement or a grudging respect. "You, too, McNab. I understand you've donated the beef."

"Not donated," McNab corrected. "I have merely backed my confidence in Rondo, and he will repay me in full if all goes well. Furthermore, he will need more than beef. About two thousand dollars, to be exact. Rondo will be pleased to have you advance that amount, at the current rate of interest."

Rondo gasped at the bluntness of this proposal. But the banker appeared not in the least nonplused.

"Yeah," he said, "on what security?"

"A chattel morgage on the beef," said McNab. "To which Rondo will have a bill of sale."

"And if he loses the beef up in that blasted wilderness, what then?"

"That," said McNab gravely, "is the sole risk involved. As a cattleman of some experience, you may judge my own appraisal of his chances of success from the fact that I am risking more than that amount in beef."

"H'm," said the banker, chewing on his cigar.

Momentary silence followed. Rondo eyed the banker fixedly. He was resentful and mortified. He felt himself to be weighed in the balance of the banker's calculating mind. It was humiliating to be placed thus at the other's whim; but there was nothing to be done. McNab sat his horse impassively and waited.

"I'll do it," said the banker at length. "There'll be two strings attached."

"Name 'em," said Rondo, masking his astonishment; for he had been certain that the other's animosity would lead him to reject the proposal.

"The first is up to you, McNab," said the banker. "I'll advance two thousand, secured by the cattle, if you'll sign the note with Rondo."

Rondo, unused to financial transactions of this character, did not realize that the banker's proposal meant that McNab's credit and property would be the security for the note. It was obvious to the cattleman, who knew also that the banker was thus evading any risk whatever in the project. The procedure meant, in effect, that McNab, by

signing the note, was making the advance direct to Rondo.

But the gaunt cattleman, having put his hand to the plow, was not one to turn back.

"I'll sign the note," he said, after a brief pause. "What else?"

"The second string," said the banker with a dry chuckle, "will be as pleasin' to Rondo as measles to the mother of twins. This is it." His gimlet eyes bored into Rondo's. "Lawson goes with you."

"Lawson!" echoed Rondo, jaw dropping. He stared at the older man and shook his head. "It's a heck of an idea," he stated, flushing. "Just you salt that two thousand away where it'll do the most good, Mr. Bodine. We'll struggle along without it. Let's go, boss. The gent's gettin' humorous with us."

"One moment," interposed McNab. "Who is Lawson?"

"Rondo's met up with him," said the banker. "He's a husky young tenderfoot from the East. If they's anything humorous in the idea, maybe I'm too thick-skulled to see it, young feller-me-lad. He's rarin' to get to the Klondike. You're makin' claim you'll get to the Klondike with the beef. You'll need an extra hand or two with them steers. Lawson's green, but he'll learn fast. I ain't sendin' him along as a star boarder. He'll earn his keep. Where's the joker?"

"Rondo," said McNab, "you've met this Lawson. How does he size up?"

"O. K.," said Rondo, mastering his rage. "They's iron in him, I reckon."

"You don't like him, eh?"

"I ain't got anything against him," said Rondo, glaring at the banker.

"Well, then," said McNab, "you should make a concession to Mr. Bodine's wishes. As I have done," he reminded.

"Check," agreed Rondo instantly. "Mister, yore bluff's called. Lawson trails along."

"Fine," said the banker. "Then the deal's settled. Call in at the office Monday and we'll sign the papers." He buttoned his greatcoat higher and turned away. "Good night, gents."

He moved away in leisurely fashion through the gloom. But when the pair had disappeared into the night, he accelerated his pace, chewing on his cigar with a savage satisfaction. He entered the house and blinked upon the pair in the settee before the fireplace. These had drawn apart hurriedly at the sound of his approach, and now sat somewhat rigidly erect.

"Lila," said the banker bluntly, "run along to bed. Me an' Syd have got some business to discuss."

"But, father," Lila protested, flushing with mortification, "Syd's leaving tomorrow!"

"No," said the banker, "he won't be leaving for a day or two. I've made other arrangements."

Lila smiled at this announcement, and took her departure with what grace she could muster.

"Marvelous," murmured the youth, leaning against the mantel and eying the banker with unfeigned admiration. "There, sir, is an example of obedience. A miracle, no less."

"Lawson," said the banker, chewing on his cigar, "whilst you been mooning around here with Lila, that young feller Rondo has been makin' dust."

"I don't doubt it," agreed the youth. "He seems quite energetic."

"He's more than energetic," said the banker. "He's got a head on his shoulders. Listen to the details."

Tersely he outlined Rondo's scheme. The debonair youth listened. Belying his languid manner, his black eyes were intent as the banker's brief summary gave a bold picture of Rondo's proposed assault on the North. As the older man explained the financial details and the arrangement whereby Lawson should accompany the herd to the Yu-

kon, the youth's cold features relaxed in a cynical smile.

"H'm," he nodded, blowing a speculative cloud of smoke upward. "Very neat. McNab has put up the beef. You will advance two thousand cash—secured by a note signed by McNab. You have arranged that I shall accompany the cattle, which permits me to reach the Yukon without expense to you. In other words, McNab is wagering a total of five thousand on the venture. Rondo is wagering his time, perhaps his life—and if he fails, his future is mortgaged. You are risking nothing." He nodded again. "Very neat, indeed. Yours is a master mind, Mr. Bodine."

"Syd," said the banker, "your dad is called the 'Fox of Wall Street.' He didn't have any silly sentiment in his make-up, and he had no time for unimportant details, just so he kept within the law. He was hard as nails, inside and out. When he wanted a thing he took it, and didn't bother about the method. I believe you're a chip off the old block. You and me can talk the same language."

"Thank you," said Lawson.

"I'll put my cards on the table," continued the banker. "There's more to this business than appears on the surface. Maybe a half hour before I was talking to Rondo and McNab about this note, Travis come by."

"Who's Travis?" inquired the youth.

"Travis is the gent whom Rondo first tried to persuade to back his play. He's the biggest cattleman in Crooked River. More beef than McNab. Travis laughed at the proposition, but McNab steps up and makes a fool out of him by calmly telling Rondo that he'll put up the beef.

"Now then, I'll let you in on some ancient history, Syd. I'm Travis' banker. I'm also McNab's banker. Travis, through methods that would cause your dad to chuckle, has increased his holdings and beef at a great rate. He's a keen business man. He doesn't like McNab. Also, in his plans for expansion, he needs McNab's holdings and McNab's beef. What was the result as far as I'm concerned? In cutthroat competition of this sort, I must be on one side or the other—so I threw in with Travis."

"Naturally," said Lawson. "Since Travis was sure to win. It wasn't a question of fair play or who was right. No ethics involved, eh?"

"No ethics," said the banker with a touch of irritation. "This is business. Now then, follow me closely, Syd, and you'll see what we're doing to McNab. He came to me for advice as to investments. I showed him where his surplus capital could be put to good use. He is now the major stockholder in the bank's holding company. If it develops that the assets of the holding company consist of the bank's questionable paper, worthless mortgages, and titles to valueless lands, Mr. McNab must charge off his losses to experience. It's a risk, you understand, that must be taken in the investment field."

Lawson nodded understanding of the banker's sardonic intent.

"When the time is ripe," continued the other, "for the purpose of showing a healthy bank statement as to quick assets, I will require of McNab his blanket note equal to the face of his securities in the holding company. When this note is called, and it develops that the holding company paper will not cover the obligation, a deficiency judgment will wipe out his personal assets, including land and beef."

"I see," said Lawson. "And in this pleasant manner, McNab will be delivered into the hands of your friend, Travis."

"Which brings us down," said the banker, "to this note of Rondo's, which is also signed by McNab. I will discount this note to Travis, so that when the crash comes and McNab is wiped from the picture, Travis can wave the

note in his face. That's the personal satisfaction Travis will insist on after the way he was called down at the saloon. He's a gent that never forgets a grudge."

"You'll pardon me, I'm sure," said Lawson. "The financial transactions you mention are very interesting as examples of primitive business methods. But I really don't see how they affect me personally."

"I'm coming to that," said the banker. "Travis doesn't want Rondo to get the beef to the Klondike. Neither do I. Neither"—he eyed the youth fixedly—"do you."

"I?" echoed Lawson. "I don't follow you at all, Mr. Bodine. I can see why you and Mr. Travis would not be bitterly grieved if Rondo and his cattle fell by the wayside. But I thought my purpose in going along was to provide help, aid and assist, thus earning my food and transportation."

"Bah!" said the banker irritably. "You're not that thick-headed, Syd. Listen. Lila's too smart a girl to pay any attention to Rondo's ambitious ideas as long as he's got nothing. But supposing that with the luck of fools and the nerve of a hundred wild cats, which he's got, he gets that beef to the Klondike and makes a clean-up? What then?"

"I see," Lawson nodded. "Then Lila might look upon his advances with more favor, huh?"

"That blushing maverick," said the banker with force, "is the last hombre on earth I would want to see teamed up with Lila. He riles me. Lila ain't just a cow-country gal, Syd. She'll have money when I pass out, gobs of it! She's fitted for something better than the high desert. She belongs in the East, where she can wrangle that said high society with the best of them. That idea," he spoke significantly, "has occurred to you, eh?"

"You embarrass me," murmured the youth. "Pardon me if I appear to blush. But are you flattering me by suggesting that I would be acceptable to you and to Lila?"

"You've grasped it," said the banker with satisfaction, mouthing his cigar.

"Gad!" breathed Lawson, eying him with a sort of gloomy awe. "I begin to see the pattern of the fabric. All's fair in love and war, what?"

"Syd, my boy," said the banker warmly, "I'm revising my estate. You're a block of the old chip."

He moved to a side table, took up a thin-necked decanter, poured out two stiff drinks, passed one to Lawson. The two men faced each other, eye to eye. Their glasses touched.

"To the beef," said Banker Bodine, "that must never reach Dawson."

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

BROWN BEARS OUSTED BY SHEEP

THE big, brown grizzly bear, which has given pleasure to countless hunters on their expeditions into Alaska, is suffering on account of the advance of civilization, with its alarming array of live-stock raisers, who prefer the domestic animals to which they are accustomed rather than the denizens of the wilds. In consequence, these farmers are gradually preëmpting the haunts of the bear in the Western Islands.

The outlook for bruin is particularly dark in the Kodiak Islands, where much of the territory has recently been taken up under grazing and homestead lease applications. About six hundred families plan to live there within a few years. And, since there is not room enough on the islands for both bear and sheep, the prospective farmers are all in favor of sheep.

Keeping Faith With Flapjack

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Dad Simms' Bee Line," etc.

CUPPING his hands, "Flapjack" Meehan yelled, "Oh, 'Dad'! Come here and tell me what's wrong with this glacier bear."

Dad Simms, Cold Deck's oldest inhabitant, hurried over to the bear cages. A glacier bear is one of the rarest animals in captivity. This bear was one of the features of Cold Deck's Rodeo, which Flapjack Meehan was taking through the country. "He don't seem to be sick, Dad," Flapjack explained, "but I wouldn't call him well."

Dad gave the bear a quick glance. "The darned cuss is homesick, Flapjack. What he needs is a companion—another glacier bear."

"Try and get one," Flapjack answered. This bear had come into his possession only by a bit of luck and was one of the finest of the species. It was of medium size; bluish-gray in color in all parts, save the muzzle, which was a dark brown from the eyes forward. The hair was long, thick, and woolly, and stood straight out from his body. He was called Barney O'Riley.

"Well," Dad answered, "it might be done, though I'll admit most expeditions have failed to get their bear."

Unexpectedly, Flapjack groaned. "Troubles never come singly. First a homesick bear, and now 'Moose' Armstrong. I'll have to beat him to the punch or he'll talk a leg off us." A regular barge of a man was bearing down on them. Flapjack's jaws clicked with determination. "No, Armstrong, I haven't a thing for you. And if you spent your money looking elsewhere for a job instead of following the rodeo about you'd probably have a steady place by this time."

"This is the outfit I want to be with,"

Armstrong announced. He thumped his chest. "I'm the strongest man in America."

"And the champion eater of America," Flapjack cut in. "The day I weakened and told you to go down to the cook tent for a free meal you ate so much the cook got sore and quit."

"For two hundred dollars a week," Moose said, "I'll appear at every show and wrestle with a bear. For three hundred dollars a week I'll wrestle two bears."

"And for five hundred dollars a week," Flapjack observed, "I suppose you'd eat a bear." His manner became that of a man tired of answering the same question. "No, Moose, I haven't a thing for you and I won't have."

"Well, thanks," Moose rumbled, "I'll be round to-morrow. Something may turn up. But I wish you'd put on my act."

"And I wish they'd declare an open season on bear wrestlers," Flapjack answered. He turned to Dad and resumed the conversation. "Rather than have this bear die, I'll ship him back to Alaska and turn him loose."

Instantly, Moose Armstrong whirled about. "Don't turn him loose. He'd be better off in a cage, fed and cared for, with nothing to do but wrestle me, than roaming the ice as the target for some rifleman's bullet."

Flapjack sighed. "Did you ever wrestle a glacier bear?"

"No, but I've wrestled black bears, and glaciers are from the same family. I looked it up in a book."

"Well, maybe the bear hasn't looked it up in a book," Flapjack retorted, "and he might not act like a black bear."

"The busiest man I ever heard tell of," Dad added, "was a man who blundered into an ice cave occupied by a glacier bear."

Flapjack was becoming angry. "I don't want to get rough, Armstrong, but you've been following this rodeo for six weeks now and I'm getting sick of having you underfoot."

"And I'm gettin' sick of bein' out of a job," Moose Armstrong answered, "bear wrestlin' is an honorable profession, and few follow it. I aim to keep it alive and not have it listed among the lost arts. I'll be around later in case you change your mind."

Flapjack set his teeth to keep from exploding. "To get back to Barney. Dad," he managed to say, "I guess the only thing is to turn him loose somewhere in Alaska. If I wasn't so busy I'd try and capture a companion, but I can't leave the show." A curious expression came into his eyes as he added, "And if you wasn't so old I'd send you."

"Why, you long drink of water," Dad said, instantly bristling, "I ain't too old for anything, and if there's a man living that can find, rope and tie a glacier bear it's me! If you'll just pay the expenses and give me a good man I'll get you a bear."

"Done!" exclaimed Flapjack, and Dad knew that he had been trapped.

Inwardly, the old sour dough was berating himself. That's once I talked too danged much, he thought. But now I'm in it, I'll have to make good. Then aloud he announced, "I can start to-morrow provided I can find the right sort of a man."

The door opened. "I'm the answer to your prayer, old-timer. When do we start?" It was Moose Armstrong.

"Just the man!" said Flapjack gleefully, seeing a chance to rid himself of the pest. "He'll catch him for you barehanded."

"Brother," announced Dad solemnly, "you're hired, but something tells me you're either going to be killed or cured."

"I'll never be cured or killed," Armstrong roared, thumping his breast. "The bear-wrestling profession ain't going to die out. I can handle any medi-

um-sized bear the world has ever produced. Show me your glacier bear and I'll lead him into camp by the ear."

"Do it," yelled Flapjack, "and I'll put on your act."

"Flapjack," Dad objected, "you're just the same as planning a murder."

Dad Simms watched Moose Armstrong put away a square meal. First, he ordered soup. Then, while waiting for the soup to appear, he worked on a stack of bread. He ate six slices. He crumpled all the crackers in sight and dropped them into the soup. This appeared to whet his appetite slightly. A steak that filled a platter presently arrived. Moose surrounded it by side dishes of carrots, turnips, peas, spinach, and an extra order of hashed brown potatoes. "I believe in eating lots of vegetables," he informed Dad. "A bear wrestler needs iron in his system."

"Yeah!" Dad agreed, as Moose continued to stow the steak away. He washed the meal down with four cups of coffee, ate three quarters of an apple pie, then glanced about with a rather hurt expression on his face as if he felt somebody was holding out on him. Dad did not look at the check, but picked it up and walked to the cashier. "Don't tell me how much it is, sister, I can't stand it," he said. "Take the amount out of this twenty, if it's enough." Dad accepted the change and thrust it into his pocket without counting. They had been seated at different tables coming up on the boat and Dad had not appreciated how much Moose Armstrong could actually eat.

Somewhat dizzily he hurried across the street to the outfitter who was getting together their supplies for the trip to Blue Glacier, where glacier bears were said to exist in numbers. "Say, Joe," Dad said, "just add six hams and ten sides of bacon to those supplies. I've got a little pardner with a man-sized appetite."

"Who's going to pack this extra grub," Joe demanded.

"He is," Dad answered.

Late that afternoon Dad made a Hudson Bay start. That is, he camped a mile or so beyond town. Kusko, Dad's lead dog, packed forty pounds, Dad carried a small pack and his rifle, and Moose Armstrong who said he was the strongest man in the world, was trying to prove it by carrying a hundred and fifty pounds—mostly grub.

For six days they moved slowly toward the great, bluish ice field that was wedged between two lofty mountains. They followed the meanderings of a swift stream that was fed by the glacier. Occasionally they stopped in shelter cabins, but usually they camped in the open. Twice they stopped to drop trees across icy streams, for Dad had reached an age when he refused to expose his old joints to ice water.

"And now," panted the giant as he dropped his pack on the floor of old Bill Freeman's cabin, "bring on your bear. This six-day drag up here was just a nice work-out." He thumped his chest, and it sounded like a bass drum. "I'm ready for anything." Dad shot a glance at the food supply. It appeared to him that Moose Armstrong's method of lightening a load was to eat it.

Bill Freeman himself was at home. "Just figgerin' to light out for the bright lights," he announced. "Good fur catch last winter, and I'm hankerin' to try out some of these newfangled dance steps I've heard about. Make yourselves to home."

"Where," Dad demanded, "can we find glacier bears?"

Freeman pointed to the glacier. It was three miles across the face and extended twenty-five miles back into the mountains. "They're hidin' out in the ice. I don't ever recollect losin' any glacier bears so I leave 'em alone."

"I'm a bear wrestler," Armstrong announced with dignity.

"A bear rassler, eh?" Freeman. grunted. "Well, you ain't no glacier-bear rassler."

"Yes, I am," Armstrong insisted.

"No, you ain't. That's just an idear you've got. Well, I'll be trottin' along. Got to catch the next boat for Seattle." He carried several bales of fur down to a canoe and shoved off into the grayish stream.

Dad and Moose rested that night and headed into the upper country early the following morning, carrying a three-day supply of grub. It ran out the night of the second day. "This ice kinda makes a man hungry," Moose observed.

"Yeah!" Dad Simms made no effort to conceal his sarcasm. He lay on a large edge of ice, scanning the country below in the hope of sighting a bear. Flapjack had told him he was too old for this sort of thing. He would show the long drink of water!

"Guess we'd better go back and get some more grub," Moose suggested, "I can't work on an empty stomach. I get faint. There don't seem to be no bear around here. Looks like we'd be climbin' around this ice quite a while."

"You go down and get more grub," Dad directed. "I'll tighten my belt and stay."

Dad missed five meals in a row before the giant returned. "Where in thunder were you?" the old sour dough demanded. "I thought something happened to you."

"I missed a couple of meals before I got to the cabin and I sure was faint. I had to eat a spell, then rest. Then I saw bear sign and I figured it might be a good idea to train on a black bear before I tackled a glacier bear. I looked all over for the cusses and couldn't find one. Well, here I am."

Dad ate in silence. He had permitted no grass to grow under his feet even though he had missed his meals. He had covered miles of ice with never a sign of bear. "To-morrow we start circling this glacier," he announced. "We've got to get a bear, Armstrong. Otherwise, Flapjack will certainly give us the laugh."

"I'm with you. But maybe I'd better hit for town and get more grub. There ain't more'n a week's supply left in the cabin. Three hams, four slabs of bacon, thirty pounds of flour, and about twenty-five pounds of canned stuff. If my stomach was empty at the critical time and I got faint——"

"It'd be terrible," Dad agreed, "but we're going to circle this glacier just the same."

There followed five days of the toughest packing Dad had ever put in. While the ice sheet groaned and thundered in its restlessness, Dad led the way over crevasses and snow bridges, hoping Moose would not break through and drag with him. They were roped together for mutual protection, but Dad knew he had a slim chance of dragging Moose to safety if he went through. Tired, exhausted, and with Moose feeling faint because he had missed a meal, they again approached Bill Freeman's cabin. "It looks like we're licked," Dad groaned. "If we can't find 'em on Blue Glacier, I don't know where they're to be found. I'd feel better if I even got a glimpse of a bear."

"What's that?"

Moose Armstrong suddenly clutched Dad's arm and pointed at the cabin. A glacier bear was emerging through the door. At the same instant he noticed the men. With a roar, he began to charge.

"Now's your chance, Moose," Dad yelled. "Grab him!"

"I'm too faint right now," Moose shouted.

Dad was swinging his .30-.30 rifle into action. "I'll try to crease him," he said. Then the rifle roared. The bear rolled over, struggled to his feet, and dived into a thicket. "I creased him, but not enough," Dad yelled. "See that furrow

I cut in his hair? Come on, let's see if he don't drop."

As they raced past the cabin, Dad's keen eyes noted that the yard was covered with tracks. "While we were running our legs off up there, that bear was loafing around here. All we had to do was to catch him. Don't that make you positively sick? You go this way and I'll go that."

Dad was hot on the trail when the brush stirred violently. Two other glacier bears were following the creased bear. Dad put on the brakes. "Sufferin' Malemutes!" he piped. "There's been three of 'em here!"

"Hey! Dad! Come here quick!" There was a note in Moose Armstrong's voice that caused Dad some concern. He ran at top speed. As he came into the open, Moose yelled again and pointed behind Dad. The old sour dough looked over his shoulder. A huge glacier bear was in hot pursuit. Dad threw up his gun and the weapon jammed. Dad dropped the gun and devoted all his strength to keeping ahead.

Moose began to jump up and down. "Hurry up, Dad! Hurry! Hurry! He's gaining! He's gaining! Why don't you hurry?"

Dad splashed through an icy stream and scrambled up the other side. "Hurry!" implored Moose.

"Shut up, dang yuh!" panted Dad. "You think I'm trying to throw this race?"

A mighty bellow from Moose turned the bear aside. Dad flopped down, panting. "Gosh dang my old pelt," he panted, "the place is full of bears! I've just happened to think. They must have smelled the bacon."

"And that ain't all," Moose answered, "they've been helping theirselves. Look! Right down below me is one of my hams."

When Dad had regained his breath he wormed his way over to a ledge and looked down.

"That's what I called you about, Dad," said Moose.

A young bear was consuming a ham with apparent relish. The sight was too much for Moose. For the moment he forgot that he was faint. "Here I go!" he whispered, and before Dad could stop him, the giant had leaped down on the bear. His great arms went about the bear's throat, then something happened. Dad could not exactly tell what it was, but the brush became a blurred mass of man and bear. Sometimes the bear roared and sometimes Moose Armstrong grunted. "Now you've got him!" yelled Dad. "Hang on! Lead him into camp by the ear and get that steady job from Flapajck! You've got him."

"I'm trying to let go," Armstrong moaned. "Shoot him, Dad!"

"I can't. My gun's jammed, and, anyway, I might hit you."

Suddenly one of Armstrong's boots was knocked into the air. A second later the shreds of his shirt settled in a small creek, then the bear broke away. Armstrong shook his head to clear the effect of several terrible blows. He was scratched in a half dozen places. "I'm through," he announced. "In the first place, I was faint from lack of food; and in the second I couldn't get my fav'rite grip."

"No, you're not through," Dad retorted, "you're just starting. I ain't going to have it said I fell down on this job. The woods are full of bears. Come back to Bill Freeman's cabin and I'll cook you a meal."

Slowly they made their way toward the log structure. "The only thing I'm afraid of," Dad complained, "is that all this rumpus may have scared 'em out."

"I hope it has. Gosh, I'm faint, and these scratches smart plenty."

"All men suffer for their art, Moose," Dad answered. "Your suffering is for the noble art of bear wrestling."

"It can't be such a noble art or it

wouldn't be dyin' out," Moose complained. Then he groaned. "Oh. gosh! How're we going to get into the cabin?"

A glacier bear completely filled the doorway. Another was peering from the shattered window.

"Look!" Dad cried. "Luck's with us. We've got 'em trapped."

Moose Armstrong gave him a withering glance. "Are you kiddin' me?" he demanded.

"Heck, no!" snorted Dad. "We'll never have a better chance than this. You run up quick and slam that door, and I'll bang that one in the window on the snoot, and——"

"Nothing doing."

"Well, you won't eat until you get into the cabin," Dad informed him. "That's where the grub is."

"Let's build a fire and smoke 'em out. All wild animals are afraid of fire," suggested Moose.

"No," Dad answered. "It wouldn't be fair to Flapjack. That glacier bear of his is a drawing card, but the poor little thing is dying because it's lonely. Ready? Charge!"

And because he was hungry, Moose Armstrong charged. With a growl the bear stood back and awaited the attack. At the right moment Armstrong sidestepped and then hurled his weight against the door. It closed. He placed a log against it, then ran to help Dad Simms.

"There's more'n two in there," Armstrong panted. "There must be fifty."

The place was in an uproar. Again and again Dad Simms banged a nose as it came through the only window. And it was not always the same nose. "Get me that rope," Dad ordered. "Hurry! They're tearing the logs out!"

Dad made a lariat out of the heavy rope and the next time a nose was thrust out he dropped the rope over the bear's head. "Now, hang on for dear life," Dad ordered. "Better still, take a turn around that stump. Now, hit for that tree." As Armstrong pulled himself to the nearest limb, Dad kicked the prop away from the door and ran for a second tree.

Five grown bears and two cubs scrambled from the cabin. "There goes a fortune in glacier bears!" Dad groaned. "Come on now. If we don't hang onto the one we've got, we'll be here for months to come."

Dad poked his head cautiously into the cabin. The bear was almost unconscious from choking. Dad roped and tied it, then slacked away. "Now, outside with him before he can get his wind."

Moose Armstrong exerted his mighty strength and dragged the bear into the open. "Keep going till you get to the bank," Dad yelled, "then we can roll him off onto a raft. That's the way to get him down the river."

"And now," pleaded Armstrong, "can I have something to eat? I've never gone this long before."

"I'm kinda empty myself," Dad admitted. Together they entered the cabin. Armstrong gathered up the shreds of his pack. It was powdered with flour. The whole cabin was dusted with the stuff. Sirup was smeared over the floor, and every can had been chewed open and the contents either wasted or eaten. "Not a thing left to eat," Dad groaned. Then he brightened. "But we've kept faith with Flapjack. We've got our bear. And you've won a bear-wrestling job."

"If I never see Flapjack and his rodeo again it'll be too soon," Armstrong retorted. "I'm going to stay in this country where a man don't have to have a job to live. I'm going to get me some grub, a lot of grub, then I'm going to kill a moose and stay right there until I get filled up. In the meantime, let's kill some game."

"There ain't anything within miles of this cabin now," Dad explained. "The bears have scared the game out. Come

on. We'll make a raft, load the bear on it, and hit for town."

Dad cinched his belt tighter and started in. He cut down several dead, dry trees and floated them to an eddy, then instructed Armstrong in the art of raft-making. If he were to remain in Alaska he would have to resort to the art on many occasions.

Twilight was continuous, and they did not stop. As the sun came over the mountains, the pair rolled the bear onto the raft and shoved. The water reached for the raft with a thousand fingers and drew it to the center of the stream. They were off.

As they roared through the first gorge, Armstrong shot an apprehensive look at Dad. "Think you're strong enough to handle this?" he asked.

Dad gave the steering pole a jerk and cleared a rock. "Yep!" he answered shortly. "And I've had experience enough, too. That's more important than strength."

Hour after hour they rushed along on the crest of the stream. "Now hang tight," Dad shouted. "There are rapids ahead!"

As far as Armstrong could see the surface was a seething mass of white water. "Look out!" he roared. "You're going to hit that bank."

"Shut up!" snapped Dad. "I know what I'm doing. Got to clear——"

And that was as far as he got. Fearing disaster, Armstrong leaped the length of the raft, brushed the old man aside, and heaved on the pole with all his tremendous strength. The pole snapped and the huge man fell backward into the river. Dad saw him swim to a bar and emerge dripping. Then Dad dropped to the raft and trusted to luck. Hanging on for dear life, he tensed himself for the next series of rapids. Foam came over the logs and drenched him. He drew his knife. If he cut the bear loose it would leap overboard and lighten the load. Thus he stood a better chance to get through. "No!" he said with decision. "Danged if I do it! I'm going to keep faith with Flapjack and that homesick bear down in the States. The look in the poor brute's eyes has been haunting me ever since." He referred to the bear's eyes, not Flapjack's.

Walls reared high and dripping on either side. It grew dark, except for the patch on blue sky above. The raft struck the walls and was shunted clear. Dad expected it to go to pieces and he had already picked the log he meant to cling to.

The raft splashed into a whirlpool, turned dizzily, and was tossed out. While in the pool, Dad dragged a green limb aboard and made another steering pole. "And now," he exclaimed, "for thirty miles of calm water!"

It was fifteen hours later that Joe, the trader, noticed something coming down the river. He picked up a line and hurried down to the bank. "Hello, Dad!" he yelled.

"Hello, Joe," Dad answered weakly. "I'm all tuckered out. Haven't had a thing to eat for forty-eight hours. Say, you might send a couple of men with about a hundred pounds of grub up to meet my pardner, Moose Armstrong. He must be getting faint from lack of food by this time."

"Sure. You had a tough trip?"

"Never had a tougher one, but it's worth it. I've kept faith with Flapjack. The danged cuss jockeyed me into going after this bear. And there it is. And just seeing it kinda takes away the tired feeling."

"That reminds me," said Joe. "Here's a message that came the day after you went up river."

Dad opened the envelope and hurriedly read the cablegram. "Sufferin' malemutes and naggin' mother-in-laws!" he yelled. "Dang it! Gosh dang it! Oh, I wish there weren't wimmin within hearin' distance! Jumpin'—oooooh!"

He jerked off his hat and jumped on it. Then his eyes fell on the bear. With a quick movement of his knife he cut the ropes binding the animal. And that moment Joe headed for the nearest tree. As the bear got to its feet Dad planted a mighty kick on the animal's rear quarters and started it on the run for the timber. Then he started swearing all over again.

Joe fished the message from the river as it floated past his tree and read:

DAD: Never mind getting that glacier bear. I felt sorry for Barney and turned him loose as we passed through Glacier Park.

FLAPJACK.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

Black-necked Stilt

(Himantopus Mexicanus)

MOST of the black-necked stilts leave the United States in the autumn, but a few remain along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. In the Eastern part of this country the stilt is exceedingly rare and in some States has been extinct for years. The West and South still claim some stilts, and with the present laws protecting birds, it is believed that they will gradually be increased.

The home of the stilt is in shallow marshes bordering upon lakes or in small ponds where the water is just deep enough to allow for wading. When standing upon its long, slender legs, the stilt is an odd-looking bird. It is one of the largest shore birds, measuring fifteen inches from bill to tail tip. Its back is entirely black, as are also the wings, making a distinctive contrast against the pure white of the lower part of its body. The bill is long and narrow.

During the breeding season the stilts usually congregate in groups of five or six pairs. About the first week in May they begin to construct their homes, which start with a small quantity of old grass placed upon the rushes and weeds of some swamp. It would seem that the slightness of material used would be of little or no use in keeping out the dampness and protecting the eggs. As if the mother bird senses this, she continually adds to her home as she sits, using dry twigs, roots of the salt grass, and sea weed, until the whole structure weighs two or three pounds. It is said that the male is very attentive to his mate while she is sitting.

Four eggs are laid, which are a dark, yellowish clay color, spotted with black. Although the nests may be placed within fifteen yards of each other, the greatest friendliness seems to exist between the families.

As soon as the eggs are hatched, the young stilts run rapidly after their elders with apparent ease. Their long, reedlike legs are admirably suited to fast running. They may be seen hurrying forward, then stopping suddenly to pick up a morsel of food, and continuing in a quick run. Another method of procuring food is to wade in water deep enough to reach the body, at which time they look much like ducks. If alarmed while engaged thus, they will rise with a harsh scream and fly off.

The food of the stilts consists of small water snails, insects, worms, and young fry of fishes. If the stilt becomes wounded when wading in the water, it does not dive from view as one might expect, but turns toward the shore and when upon the land, runs nimbly away in hiding.

While Bullets Sang

By Max Brand

Author of "The Return of Geraldi," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WISDOM OR HONOR?

IN the entire town, there was but one cool room, and that was the rearmost chamber of an inn, which looked out on the pasture behind, bordered with cottonwood trees, through whose trunks one could see the blare of light thrown up from the desert beyond. Indeed, this room was only warm by comparison. Cullen, who was surveying a tray of Mexican gold and silver work held for him by an old woman, squirmed uneasily in his chair from time to time as the heat touched his nerves. Even the Mexican in the apartment leaned back in his chair with a glistening face. Geraldi alone was at ease, even though he had but lately returned from robbing the Naylors in their almost inaccessible ranch retreat.

"If you'd shut the window," said Cullen, his grumbling and inactive partner in the enterprise, "you'd keep out the hot air! Where's Darcy, and we could play a game of poker to kill the time?"

"Darcy's in the street looking over some horses. Have you seen him?" responded Geraldi with a faint smile. "And if I shut the window, Harry, I'll still be able to see you obscurely, but you won't be able to see those treasures. For my part, I won't be able to see my best friend!"

The Mexican chose this instant to break into the talk.

"Is that your best friend?" he said, pointing through the window toward a glorious black stallion.

"That's my best friend," agreed Geraldi. "He's risked his life for me; no man ever has done as much."

He beckoned, and though the horse stood with its back turned, yet it came at once cantering from the farther side of the pasture. At the window it halted with head high and bright eyes. The Mexican, in the meantime, had fairly trembled with delight as he watched the gallop of the horse, and now his eyes went busily from point to point, estimating bone, length of rein, girth where girth counts for bottom, shoulders, and above all that eye which told of the fearless and enduring heart within.

Wherever he looked, he could find no fault, and he bit his lip with envious pleasure. Geraldi, in the meantime, had stretched out his hand with a quarter of an apple in the palm. This the stallion nibbled at, or was about to, when it disappeared and came into view in the hollow of the master's elbow; the black horse struck at it angrily, as a snake would fling its head. But it missed. Geraldi was holding the apple a distance to the side!

The Mexican, however, did not approve of this jesting.

"A high-spirited horse like that, señor, may be ruined by such play, as of course you know."

"Ruined, my friend?" asked Geraldi, opening his eyes in an innocent way he had.

The stallion chose that moment to catch him by the forearm, and the Mexican blenched with horror as he saw the head of the horse made snaky as with flattened ears and gleaming eyes it kept its hold.

"Dios!" said the Mexican, and reached inside his coat for a weapon. "Your arm is crushed, señor!"

Geraldi, however, now turned up the imprisoned hand with the apple in it.

"This is the rule of the game," said he, as the horse took the bit with accurate teeth from the palm. "But generally he has to work longer."

He rubbed the moist spot from his sleeve with a handkerchief, and smiled on his startled companion, while the stallion frisked to the farther side of the pasture and stood there a moment with his head a trifle turned, as though hoping that there might be another session of play.

The Mexican watched him with hungry admiration.

"Such a horse"—he said rather huskily, and with a pause—"such a horse makes a king of his rider; his saddle is a throne, señor. I, also, have some fine animals which give me pride. I would exchange them all for this stallion. There is no price, however?"

"There is no price," said Geraldi. "One can't set a money value on a friend."

"True," said the other, "true."

But his eyes brooded greedily, greedily on the horse.

Here the door opened, and a great-shouldered man came in with a waddling gait like a sailor's stride. Red and ugly of face, thick-limbed, with great dangling arms, he looked like some primitive monster from which man might have developed, but which was not man. He was, however, only Lambert Naylor, who had left his kith and kin to go off with Geraldi—for Geraldi was a man whom he could admire.

"What's happening to Darcy?" asked Geraldi.

"He's in a kind of a tight fit," said the big man, taking out a thick plug of tobacco and nipping off a corner with a click of his teeth. "He's between a spavined pinto and a cream-colored mare with ringbone. If he was color blind, he might pick a tolerable hoss, but the colors is all that he can see. They's a roan fit to carry the Prince of Wales all week, and the royal king on Sunday

—that hoss has been danced up and down the street for Darcy to look at, but he can't make up his mind to see it. It ain't got the color. Besides, he says that a roman-nosed brute ain't fit for a gentleman to sit on."

"Did you give him any good advice?" asked Geraldi.

"I been talkin'," said Lambert Naylor, "till my throat is as dry as the pith of a dead Spanish bayonet. But it ain't any good. He won't listen to me. You'd better come and flash on the light for him, Jimmy. He'll listen to you, maybe."

"I doubt it," said Geraldi, "but I'll try it!"

With that, he rose and left the room, accompanied by Naylor, while Harry Cullen, at last weary of looking at trinkets, sent out the old woman on their heels.

"Señor Cullen?" said the Mexican, lowering his voice. "May I speak five words to you?"

"About what?" asked Cullen, insolent from nervousness and the exhaustion of the heat.

"About stolen goods, señor."

Harry Cullen's face turned to stone; then danger came up like a tide in his eye.

He rose from his chair and stepped between the stranger and the door, but the latter spread out his hands in the age-old gesture of surrender.

"You have nothing to fear from me, Señor Cullen! I am only an ambassador."

"You know what?" asked Cullen bluntly.

"I know," the Mexican told him, "that Darcy, the man with the crippled hands, broke open the safe of the Naylors, was caught when he tried to escape, crucified against a tree, and saved from death by Indians. I know that he found a clever friend, named Cullen, and told him of a treasure in the hands of the Naylors, and that Cullen went with Darcy to a still greater man—James Geraldi! I know that Geraldi actually dared to ride into the Naylor Ranch on the pretense of escorting to the house the girl engaged to Jerry Naylor. That he was, nevertheless, caught and bound hand and foot; that he escaped, robbed the safe a second time, and actually succeeded in breaking away from the place and rejoining his companions, accompanied by one of the Naylors in person—this Lambert, who worships Geraldi like a god. I know, besides, that you still are not safe, that you have stopped here to rest through the heat of this day, feeling that you have distanced pursuit. But, you see, the pursuit already has caught up with you!"

Cullen, with a muttered oath, stepped back and glanced apprehensively toward the window.

"Caught up with you in my person alone, perhaps," said the Mexican. "But, nevertheless, here I am to speak for your enemies."

"Talk," said Cullen with a sneer, "never would stop us."

"I have written words, however," answered the other, and taking a paper from his pocket, he unfolded it and spread it on the table before Cullen. The message ran:

DEAR CULLEN: It's a long hunt, and the four of you have ridden well. But I think you'll agree that we are giving you trouble. You are not simple enough to think that our chase will end as soon as you are definitely over the edge of the horizon, even if we should lose touch with you as far as that. I think you know that we'll never stop. We have money to continue the search, and we intend to use it. There's no corner of the world that will hide any of you. If you think this over, you may see some truth in it.

The ones we want are Geraldi, because he robbed and mocked us; Darcy, because he suggested all of this, and above all Lambert Naylor, because he is a traitor to all his blood.

What price will we pay?

That price will consist in the first place of your absolute safety. You may have the assurance that instead of seeking for your

life, we shall defend it. Your share of the spoils which Geraldi took will be given to you. And more. We understand that you and Darcy have quarters and that a half remains with Geraldi. We will increase your share to a full third, if you will assist us to capture the other two.

The means of doing this may be discussed and decided between you and our good friend, José Pinas, who is bringing this to you.

I am leaving this unsigned for obvious reasons. I think the contents will assure you that we mean what we write.

Otherwise, we cannot give you any guarantee. You must simply accept our naked word, if this is sufficient for you.

Here the letter ended without a name, but Cullen continued bent over it as though the blank sheet beneath were covered with inscriptions.

José Pinas began to speak softly:

"Already the four of you have escaped half a dozen times by the skin of the teeth, as you know, and by the craft in Geraldi. But you cannot continue to escape forever. I see that you consider the message. As a wise man, you must do so! My dear Señor Cullen, this is a fortune placed safely in your hands. As for the means, how simple to arrange! If you are camped in the desert hills, a small fire secretly built and made to wink three times through the darkness would be enough. If you were——"

Cullen threw up a hand as though that current of speech were a physical thing which had to be broken off.

"I've heard enough," said he.

Then anger seemed to grow up in him like the flower of fire.

"Do you take me for a traitor to my companions, Pinas? I've heard enough from you. Get out of my sight!"

The Mexican bowed and moved toward the door.

"Who in the name of all that's evil," said hot-faced Cullen, "told the Naylors that I'm not a man of honor?"

His hand on the doorknob, again the other bowed.

"Ah, my dear friend," said he, "in this human world, should not wisdom still walk by the side of this honor?"

And he was gone.

Cullen, as though struck by a second thought, hurried after him, but at the door he paused, shook his head, and turned back slowly into the room.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN.

UNDER the horse shed in the late afternoon the four men gathered while the *mozos* saddled the second-string horses; for each had two mounts, the best to be kept in reserve for special needs. It was just past the period of greatest heat, but now the air was totally dead, untouched by a breeze that would spring up toward sunset time. The flies buzzed with an intolerably sleepy drone, flies in myriads, small as gnats; they covered the loins of the horses and rose in clouds from the twitching withers.

The four men accepted this condition in different ways. Darcy was simply sleepy; big Lambert Naylor was sullently silent; Cullen kept his lips nervously compressed and continually brushed his wet face with a handkerchief; but Geraldi was as ever, cool, rather detached from the circumstances around him, like a general looking from the rear of the course of a battle which he hoped to win, while taking nothing for granted and giving away no chances. He wore a wide felt hat, whose brim slouched loosely, a tan flannel shirt, open at the throat, a gun belt—an unusual item with one who preferred his Colts beneath the cover of his coat—and the usual boots and tight trousers. But even these rough clothes could not disguise the dignity and the peculiar authority of Geraldi.

He was looking over the other three at the present moment.

"We trim down to essentials," he

said. "If there's any waste weight, we leave it behind. You all agree?"

They were silent; Naylor flapped a big hand at his face to keep the flies away.

"That gold and silver junk you are buying weighs seven or eight pounds," said Geraldi to Cullen. "You'd better cache that here. You've bought a pair of fancy guns, Darcy. They stay behind. One rifle and one Colt is our allowance, and a heavy allowance at that! I'm half of a mind to keep only one rifle and one revolver in the party!"

Cullen could endure no more. His compressed lips parted with an explosion.

"Confound it, Jimmy, who made you the tyrant over this party?"

Darcy added: "I've rode desert trails half my life. I know what a hoss can pack as well as any Geraldi that ever stepped."

They looked to Naylor for confirmation of this revolt, but "The Lamb," sullen and silent as usual, kept his eyes fixed upon the face of Geraldi and said nothing at all, and made no sign.

The latter replied to the rebels briefly and to the point:

"If we travel together," said he, "we travel under my command. Absolute command, mind you, like that of a captain when his ship is at sea, because we're all like voyagers on a dangerous ocean as anything I can imagine. If you don't like that decision, do as you please, and I cut off for myself."

"You're loco if you don't," said Naylor. "You and me, why should we have the pair of 'em on our hands?"

Darcy, with an oath, would have accepted these new conditions, but Cullen capitulated the instant he felt the spur pressed home.

He said, with a forced smile: "Come, come, Jimmy, you're not going to jump down my throat at the first word? Of course, we have to stick together. What chance would we have otherwise? Darcy, don't be a chump. We all need each other; you still can squeeze a gun butt into those cramped hands of yours."

That speech decided the course of affairs. Darcy and Cullen went back to the inn to leave their unnecessary burdens behind them. The moment they were gone, Naylor turned briskly to Geraldi.

"Well, chief," said he, "why don't we start? They're gunna be a dead weight, the pair of 'em. Darcy's broke, his spirit's broke. When they drove the spikes through his hands, they drove something through his heart, too, and he's been more'n half dead ever since. Cullen—he's got a sneakin' look. We're better rid of the pair of 'em!"

Geraldi nodded.

"You have eyes, Lamb," said he, "but I meant what I said about a ship at sea. We're still in the middle of the voyage, man, and we'll have to stay with one another until the whole crew agrees to leave the ship at the same time. I'm the skipper. You can't expect me to drop over the side and make off by myself, can you?"

Lambert Naylor squinted at him, then raised his eyes to the sky and looked for the answer there, but not finding any, he merely shrugged his massive shoulders. Brain work was not the specialty of this giant. By the power of his hands he had wrought his salvation from all dangers in life, and broken the intricate thread of all problems, until the unlucky day he met Geraldi and found that all his might of hand was useless against the scientific craft of the smaller man.

"You got the knowledge of what's best, chief," said he. "You talk—I'll try to foller!"

So they were waiting in the saddle when the other pair returned and started off at once.

It was slightly uphill to the cottonwoods, and after the first passage under the slant but still powerful rays of the sun, they paused again for a moment in

this shade. Beyond it lay the treeless dunes of the desert, where they would be naked of defense. The little village —almost as Mexican as Mexico itself— was stretched in a sinuous line along the bank of the river. It was no river, now, but a series of greenish pools until the next lucky rainfall in the highlands might send down a stream of fresh though muddy water. A wretched little village, with the dust rising from the children who played in the street and hanging like a very thin smoke above the houses; but the whitewashed walls looked as comfortable as a fortress to the four, at this moment.

However, they shrugged that suggestion out of their minds, well knowing that what had been a secure resort for them would become a many-handed trap the instant the Naylors arrived.

After that backward look, they went forward again, and passing down a short slope, they were fairly committed to the desert. Sweat leaped out on the horses; in five minutes they were dripping, their nostrils stretched for more and cooler air, and their heads dropped in resignation to their task. The riders, too, followed the example of the horses, and bowing their heads, crossed their hands upon the pommels of the saddles and gave themselves up to the labored motion of the horses in wading through thin surface sand.

The exceptions were the black stallion, and Geraldi, for their heads were as high and their eyes as bright as ever. And the horse, jealous at the sight of his dear master on the back of another mount, ever and anon pressed up close beside Geraldi, with a snort of disgust and a toss of his crest.

Geraldi, on such occasions, chuckled a little, but always soothed the stallion with a word, or with a touch of the hand.

Then, mercifully, the sun turned red!

Up to that very instant it had remained as hot, well nigh, as noonday, but now its cheeks puffed out. The lower edge dipped to touch the western hills, it climbed slowly down and out of sight.

Now that it had lost its stinging force, they were sorry to see it go. For a long night march across a desert is not the most pleasant of all labors in this world. However, it was gone, and out of the place where it had sunk, a wind came back to them, and blew their bodies cold with the moisture which had been streaming on them the moment before, and turned their damp shirts clammy. The horses, too, felt the change, and every one of them shuddered a little.

"The Injuns got a story about the sunset wind," commented Darcy.

"Let's have it," said Cullen. "It's a ghost story, I'll lay my money!"

"You lay right," answered Darcy. "One time—this is the way the yarn goes—the sun was travelin' through the middle of the sky, and he seen an Injun girl walkin' out of a village and goin' down to a river. He seen her, and she looked pretty good to him.

"He couldn't drop down out of the sky and chin with her, because the way he was then, he'd of burned her to a crisp, the first word that he spoke. So he waits for the time when he's climbed down into the west and got cooled off a little. But there still was a rag of purple on his cloak and a touch of gold in his hair feathers when he jumped up and ran east across the world. As he ran, his robe spread out, and he was chilly, sort of, what with running so fast and being afraid that he would never find the girl again, and the fear run down in trembles along his shoulders and arms, and run out along his robe, and the cold flapped off the edges of the robe and made the air cool.

"And that's the way the night wind is cool, and it's the sun, runnin' to find the girl he loves, and the fear of not findin' her, is what makes the chill in the air."

"Look here," broke in Naylor, with a puzzled air, "what happened? Did he find her?"

"Sure he found her," said Darcy. "But the purple in his robe, mind you, and the gold in his hair feathers was still so dog-gone bright that blame me if she didn't drop dead just as he was reachin' for her."

"It's a got a sad endin', then," said Naylor. "And even him bein' the sun god, he could whoop and holler, and dance, but he couldn't dance the life back into her body, no more?"

"No," said Darcy, "he couldn't."

"But look here," pursued big Naylor, whose fancy had been caught at last by this subject. "If she's dead, how come that he's still racin' and runnin' back after her every evening?"

"How do I know?" shouted Darcy. "You talk like a child!"

"When you say them things to me, son," said the formidable growl of Naylor, "say 'em slow, so's you can swaller the words afterward one by one, and get the taste of 'em as they go down backward!"

This ugly remark reduced the party to silence, until Geraldi began to whistle.

Even that tune presently died. The desert stars, dim behind a dusty atmosphere, burned far away and small, so that the arch of the heavens grew more and more enormous, until the black of the night was complete. And so great was the sweep of them that it seemed as though where they rode the earth was pressing upward, and they were looking down the curve of the world, and over the external barrier of the horizon.

For some time there was not a sound except the creaking of the stirrup leathers, and the cinch straps; or sometimes the jingle of bit chains, like bells rattling far away. These were the only sounds, and the continual swishing of sand about the hoofs of the horses, like water down the side of a boat. So they journeyed into the dimness until The Lamb took up again the subject which had fascinated him.

"Think of him, though, when she dropped, and he picked her up! Still warm, mind you, but nothin' there. Snapped out like the snapper off of a whip; gone like the tail of a polywog; or the flash of a shot; or the singin' of a bullet. He couldn't get her back. Not even a god. Think of him, how he must of whooped it up, and cussed!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DESERT MARCH.

THE first chill of the night wind on the desert is deceptive, as a rule, though winds there can blow cold enough, to be sure! But chiefly it is the sense of cool produced by the evaporation of the moisture of the day; and when that is gone, the skin grows dry, and burns once more.

But on this evening, there was an alteration in the direction of the prevailing air current. It changed from the delightful west—sea-flavored that breeze had seemed!—to the arid south, where the air had been soaking up the shimmering heat of the Mexican deserts for two thousand miles of misery.

And the touch of that wind dried them to the core, like bones turned porous on the sands by a hundred years of baking sun and acrid gales. Each man carried two canteens. The first was emptied almost at once, before Geraldi called a halt to the procession and delivered his opinion briefly.

"I'm not a desert rat," he said, "and I've never spent many years on the sand, but I know, whether in Arabia or in Arizona, that the fellow who spends his water is worse than the man who spends all his gold that's in the bank—the inheritance, as you may call it. Now, then, go slow with the second canteens!"

"There ain't any great call," said Darcy. "I'm leadin' you straight to the Wells."

"They're sure to have water in 'em?"

"Been there twenty times, every season of the year. Never found 'em dry. Sometimes kind of alkali, but always wet water, and the chiefest main principal thing that water can be on a desert is wet, I always claimed."

"Very well," said Geraldi, "but this wind is like Death Valley, and I intend to take my second canteen a swallow at a time. Naylor, you, at least, had better follow my example."

"Why," said Naylor, "I ain't more'n half finished the first one. Any gent that trusts a desert is loco. I'm here to say so."

"Aye," admitted Darcy, "they's something in that! And it's a funny thing how quick a gent can get dry! I disremember who was tellin' me the yarn about the gent that started walkin' across from the mouth of a mine in Nevada to the other side of the valley, where he could see a spring jumping and sparkling, and the water disappearin' into the ground. Looked like he could step across in no time, he bein' a greenhorn, and he finished up the canteen of water he had with him, and pretty near died of thirst before he got to the other side."

"He was climbin'," said Naylor, "and besides, he must of been a tenderfoot that let his imagination get hold of him. There ain't anything worse than imagin' things when you're in the desert. The gent that starts imaginin' is the gent that starts the trouble, pretty nigh always!"

After that, all conversation died down, except when some one made a self-conscious, spasmodic effort, for it is well known that of all the terrible things, silence in the desert is the most awful.

But the words would not come. The wind whistled through their clothes, burned their bodies, half blinded their eyes with its stinging dryness. Like a sponge it touched them, and somehow seemed to possess the infernal property of sucking their blood out through the skin.

It was Cullen who finished his second canteen before the others. He was ashamed to confess it, for some time, and finally he had to clear his throat with an effort before he asked: "Those wells, Darcy—how far away are they now?"

"Half an hour, maybe!"

"Half an hour!" said Cullen, and was silent, but there had been horror in his voice.

So Geraldi drew over beside him and covertly handed him his canteen.

"Take a swallow of this," he said briefly.

Cullen snatched it, and a long swallow it was that he poured down his throat.

"Thanks," he panted, as he handed it back. "We'll soon be there, anyway."

Geraldi made no retort to this, but corked his canteen and hung it against the saddle.

Suddenly, Darcy's horse in the lead, grunted and broke into a trot of its own accord, and all the other animals followed, the led horses pulling eagerly ahead on their ropes.

The reason was clearly seen in a moment by even the dullest eyes, for in the shallow hollow before them they saw the glitter of stars upon the ground! A handful of the sky, as it were, fallen through and lying very faintly on the earth!

Down they swept to the place, every throat open, every mouth instinctively agape, but when Darcy arrived there in the lead, they could hear the hoofs of his horse plodding in and out of the mud.

"Mud!" he yelled savagely over his shoulder. "It ain't nothin' but mud and a film of wet on the top. It's a dang cheat!"

They reined back their horses and leaned from the saddle in order to see the better.

It was bitterly true! A bit of surface moisture, hardly thicker than dew, had sufficed to reflect the stars as in a tarnished mirror, but all through the brightest places there were now visible small dark lumps and projections of the mud that struck through and had dried at the top.

Darcy was the first to have heart to speak.

"This one is no good," he confessed, "but the Wells, they couldn't go back on a gent like this. We'll be sure to hit water in one of 'em around here. Scatter out, and the first one that finds it, sing out loud and let us know, will you?"

They scattered. The very horses seemed to know what this was about, for they stepped out eagerly in the chase of the silver glitter of the stars reflected from the earth.

For half an hour they worked, and then the clear voice of Geraldi, pitched high, rang out to them and called them together like the note of a horn.

Silently, they gathered. The horses stood about restlessly, biting at their bits, which were hot in the mouth, and starting off sidewise, now and then, as though they wanted to renew the search.

"We've spent long enough here," said Geraldi. "There's no usable water here!"

"Suppose," said Cullen, "that we were to skim off the sum, and boil that down——"

"Where would we find the wood for fuel or the pans to render it in?" asked Geraldi. "We haven't a distillation plant with us, Cullen, you'll be surprised to learn."

His words were acid enough, but his voice was extremely gentle.

He went on: "We'll hear advice, now? Who will say something about the next step?"

'They's more wells," began Darcy.

A general groan stopped him.

"They're a pretty long march away, though," he confessed. "I never heard of these here givin' out before, and I——"

"Let them drop," advised Geraldi. "This is the situation. We're here in the middle of dryness. We can't get across, without the help of water, and there's no water to be had. If we try to complete this march north, I think that not many of us will get through to the farther side. But we can turn to either side and make for the hills."

"Miles and miles away from here!" exclaimed Cullen. "Look yonder! I can see 'em against the stars——"

"He can read distances at night, can he?" growled Naylor. "He's the first I ever seen that could, then!"

"Left and right, they're both about the same distance away, I suppose," said Geraldi. "Which shall we make for? The southern hills are the ones that the Naylors will be most likely to come into, as they march up from that direction. Those over to the east, they're not so likely to take, unless they gamble that we may try to outguess them, and so take the odd chance."

"They'll be in both ranges," said The Lamb shortly.

The others were silent, convinced that this would be the case.

"Or in the desert behind us," said Cullen hopefully, "and starving for water, as we are, I trust!"

"They won't be in the desert," said Naylor.

"Why not? In the village, nobody knew that the Wells were dry."

"They did know. They must of knowed. They only lied to us!"

"They only lied," agreed Geraldi. "And as The Lamb says, it hardly makes any difference to which range we start, except that the eastern ones will be nearer on our way. Shall we head for them?"

They agreed to that procedure.

"A drink, then," said Cullen, "before

we start out. A drink, don't you think so, Jimmy?"

"By all means," said Geraldi.

But The Lamb broke in harshly: "A drink for the hosses! What kind of desert men are you gents? A drink for the hosses, you square tops! Not a drop for yourselves!"

And Darcy admitted with a reluctant drawl: "A drink for the hosses. He's right."

"It will be the same as shooting ourselves through the head!" said Cullen bitterly. "These great brutes are still puffed up with moisture, but for my part, I'm on fire from head to foot! I've got to have some water!"

"You've had more than the rest of us," said Naylor cruelly. "You've had both of your canteens, and the rest of us have saved part. Jimmy, shut him up, because my hands are beginning' to itch to grab hold of him!"

Cullen was sufficiently silenced by this, and one by one they forced up the heads of the horses and gave them the little water that remained in them.

There was only one exception; the black stallion did not receive a single drop.

"He's stronger than the others," explained Geraldi curtly, when he was asked. "He'll have to take his chances on using a little more of that surplus energy without water to feed it! Now get into the saddles, and we'll start. And the first man to make a remark about his thirst I'll turn off his horse and let him walk the rest of the distance to the hills on foot!"

That threat had its effect, for however much their brains tormented them with visions and dreams of paradises of ice, they were silent about their thoughts.

All other ideas seemed to be suppressed at the same time, and in utter silence they marched on toward the hills which never grew before them, but seemed to be receding beneath the dim stars.

And finally Cullen burst out: "They aren't hills at all! They're only mists on the sky line."

No one answered him to agree or disagree. These were the only words spoken on the last stage of that desert march.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS HIS MIND.

WHEREVER they's water for us, they's danger for us, too," said Darcy, when at last they came near to the hills, and the rolling black outlines were drawn across the sky. "We don't know this country half as well as the Naylors do, and they'll be reasonable sure to get every spring and water hole and creek pretty well spotted in the hills on both sides."

"They ain't got an army, though," said The Lamb. "They can't be everywhere at once."

"I guess we'll think so before we're through!" said Darcy.

The first of the dawn came as they entered the nearest gully leading northeast through the hills; and now the slopes turned gray, and finally soft green. Rain had been here; streams of some sort surely could not be far off!

And it was as they hurried up the valley that, on passing the mouth of a narrow gulch that fed into the larger depression, Naylor lifted his hand and stopped the party. They sat their saddles like statues, listening, while the sides of the horses heaved rapidly, and their whole bodies shook with the trembling of their legs.

"Water!" said Naylor, and swung straight into the mouth of the little canyon.

As he spoke, they all could hear it—a soft sound of rushing and gurgling that seemed to freshen their dry throats immediately, as though the water already were being swallowed. And in a rush they followed The Lamb.

The little canyon twisted before them

like a snake, as though trying to delay them, but when they found the place, it seemed even to the calm mind of Geraldi one of the most beautiful spots on earth! For from beneath one steep bank a head of water sprang up a foot at least, and running outward formed a big pool with the sand sloping down all around it like the sides of a natural basin. There was no exit for this water that could be seen, showing that it was drained off from beneath through the porous soil. Yet perhaps this very stream was the source of the current that wandered far underground and reached at last the Wells in the desert. At least, Geraldi thought of this as he saw the horses rush for the water.

The men had to fight them back, for fear that, hot and dry as they were, the animals might be foundered. Geraldi saw Naylor, half to his knees in the flood, striking at the noses of the horses, and with his free hand scooping up mouthfuls of the water!

When the horses had been allowed all that was thought fitting for them, they were drawn aside and tethered, while the men went on with the work of washing out and filling canteens, and of filling themselves to the very lips with this treasure of which they had been dreaming during so many hours. And no matter how much they drank, still their dried bodies craved for more, insatiably, and no matter how much lay before them, they could not be satisfied.

Cullen, now that the crisis was over, was seized by an overwhelming laughter, and seemed to feel that the joke was upon the others. He kept pointing at one or another of his companions and actually staggered with his mirth; but they paid him no heed, being ashamed to look at a man who could not hold himself together better than this.

They stretched themselves on the sand around the edge of the pool, now, and watched the dawn colors thicken in the sky above them, and the coolness of the earth sank into their hot bodies, and they raised their heads and envied the images of the willows about the pond, forever floating in crystal water.

"Hungry!" asked some one.

"Could eat a coupla bear," declared The Lamb.

"We'd better breakfast," said Cullen. "We're all dizzy with hunger."

"We'd better march, and we shall march," answered Geraldi. "Get up, boys, and tighten your cinches."

They scowled at him, one and all, but his voice was also that of their own consciences, so they rose with groans and went to the horses which grunted in turn like pigs when they felt the sudden jerk and gripping of the girths again.

A morning wind had commenced to blow, singing among the crags above them and rustling in the willows near by, and doubtless it was this noise which allowed disaster to creep up on them unheard. But as Darcy swung into his saddle, a rifle clanged from the cliff above and he pitched on over the back of his horse, cursing like a pirate.

He was not too badly hurt to spring up from his fall and run in under the verge of the rocks where bullets could not be fired down at him. The others had done the same thing, and in this momentary shelter they mounted in grim haste. Geraldi lingered to help the wounded man to the back of his horse. He saw that the left arm of Darcy hung useless.

He gave one questioning look to Darcy, but the latter, white-faced, with teeth set hard, made no response except to spur frantically down the ravine.

Geraldi followed, letting the black stallion find his own way, while the master turned in the saddle to watch the rearward rocks, his gun poised for a parting shot.

But no second bullet was fired. Either they were out of range, riding so closely under the high bank or else it was a single outpost of the Naylors

who had found them and dared not show himself enough to get in another round.

So they poured down the canyon, the armed hoofs of the horses raising thunder on either side. Cullen, in the lead, shot down the first opening on the right, and they galloped like mad up a long gully that carried them, eventually, into the open hills.

Naked hills they were, over which the eyes could carry for leagues, but there was no need of trees or brush to give shelter to any who were stalking them, for everywhere small draws and canyons ran, splitting the hills into a species of bad lands. They had to take a zigzag course, feeling their way down the side of the ravine, then crossing it at the first favorable chance, and climbing up the other bank, only to be stopped again by a similar obstacle a little farther on.

"We've got time," said Naylor suddenly. "They're callin' for help. Look back!"

They looked, and saw behind three puffs of smoke rising into the air, the topmost one already dissolving in the wind, the lower two still compacted, looking like white balls of snow.

Beneath the three only a scattered haze ascended, showing that the fire had been muzzled thoroughly and beaten out.

"That's the call," said Naylor. "Help —riding north. That'll call in every Naylor riding in sight of the smoke, and all of 'em must be in sight of it. Where'll we go now?"

"Straight on north, but faster!" urged Cullen.

"Go where they expect us?"

"We'll stop here and talk it over," said Geraldi, dismounting. "Darcy, get down and let me have a look at that!"

"I'm all right," said Darcy, through his teeth. "Only scratched. I'd rather keep on goin'!"

His motive was plain.

If he were too badly injured, they were apt to cast him out as a useless burden; and if the Naylors caught him, a second torturing was the best that he could hope for!

Geraldi did not repeat his suggestion in words; he merely beckoned, and Darcy obediently slid to the ground. He was ordered to lie flat, and complied at once with a faint groan of despair and relief. In a moment more his shirt had been opened, the blood sponged away with a little water from Geraldi's canteen, and the course of the bullet was apparent at once.

It had cut down through the shoulder, penetrating the inner, fleshy part, and then ranged across three ribs. When Geraldi manipulated these, two of them were obviously broken; the wounded man turned white under the pressure.

"He's done up," critically said Cullen, who had been standing apart, taking no share in the help of the hurt member, but now ready to speak. "He's used up. Anybody could see that by a look at his face. Geraldi, are you going to waste any more time on him?"

Geraldi looked up for one long second from his work of drawing heavy, tight bandages around the body of Darcy; then he continued his labor in silence. Cullen flushed a little at the unspoken rebuke.

"I mean," said he, "that he could sneak off to the side, and they'd never look for him. It's the rest of us that they want more than they ever do Darcy. They won't even notice. They'll be busy hanging on our trail."

He received no answer. Only the grim eye of Naylor was considering him like a difficult passage out of a strange but obnoxious book, and in another moment he had finished helping Geraldi.

"Are you better, now?" the chief asked the hurt man.

"If I can breathe, I'll be pretty good," said Darcy.

"You can't breathe, against that bandage," said Geraldi. "Not real

breaths, or they'll start the wound bleeding again. But you can breathe short and quick. You understand? Short breaths and many of them will keep you going in good style."

"I'll try," said Darcy, looking far off at the mountains, where he longed to be at that moment.

"Try it, and remember that we're with you and won't give you up till the finish."

Darcy nodded. He did not waste time even in thanks, but was heaved into his saddle by the mighty hands of The Lamb, and rode on the trail again.

Naylor had the lead, now, as one best suited to find a passage across such broken territory as this. Cullen dropped back beside Geraldi.

"I wanted to tell you, Jimmy," said he, "that I'm no cold-blooded scoundrel that wants to let a partner go. But I ask you to look this problem in the face. Is there any likelihood that we'll be able to get away when we're loaded down by a half helpless man like Darcy?"

Geraldi nodded agreement.

"He takes away two thirds of our chances," said he.

"Of course he does," said the other, happy to find this acquiescence. "And remember that he's at his best, now. Every moment he's sure to get worse as the loss of blood tells on him, as the wound grows sore and stiff. And if he's an encumberance now, what will he be, then?"

"Harry," said Geraldi, "I never heard better logic or closer reasoning even from you."

"But——"

"But logic isn't enough, old fellow. We have to have something more. We have to have something out of the way —instinct, let's say?"

"You certainly talk just like a woman, Jimmy!"

"Thanks," said Geraldi. "You don't hurt me by saying that."

"And you stay with him? You anchor us with him?"

"Not 'us,'" said Geraldi. "You and Naylor can do as you please. But, as you know, I'm the captain of the ship and have to be the last over the side! I'm with it till she sinks!"

CHAPTER V.

A TEST OF MEN.

AS as a ship labors and strains in a rough sea, so the horses heaved and stumbled and rocked over the ridges of that infernal going. The sun rose, and in five minutes was pouring heat over the hills, but still there were shadowy gorges into which they dropped from time to time until high noon came, and then there remained no shelter. Shoulders burned and blistered under flannel shirts. The springing moisture burned dry the instant it appeared, and every face was gray with salt. Gray were the horses, also.

Two of them, far spent, with gaunted bellies and arching backs, no longer could be trusted with saddle and with rider but had to remain on the lead ropes, tugging back at every declivity, at every upward slope.

Nervous anxiety added to the strain, and, above all, when Naylor waved his hand in a broad arch to the rear, and pointed out three columns of smoke that mounted toward the sky.

"There's three gangs of the boys coming after us," he declared. "They've seen the signal, and they're hopping after us!"

"There's no law in this part of the country!" exclaimed Cullen. "By heaven, it makes my blood boil when I think of those scoundrels, those known scoundrels, being permitted to ride unscathed through the hills pursuing us! Where's the sheriff? Where are the posses that one reads about? Bah!"

"The sheriff," replied Geraldi, with his flashing smile, "generally is busied

with cases in which at least one side is honest."

Cullen started to answer, but seeing the point of the remark, he fell gloomily silent. Once or twice his eyes twitched aside and his lips curled over a wicked retort, but he repressed it, and went on without speech.

He was in the best condition of any of the others, with the exception of Geraldi. The latter had given up his second-string horse to The Lamb, whose enormous bulk had worn out one animal already; nevertheless, the black stallion seemed to have more in reserve than any other two of the mounts put together. Cullen, however, was equipped with two good nags, and since he was an excellent rider, he had kept them in fine condition. As for Darcy, he could not help but be a drag on a horse, no matter how excellent and strong it might be, for his horsemanship now was confined to clinging with both hands to the pommel of his saddle.

"You'd better have a drink," suggested Geraldi, as the heat of the day approached its fiery climax, and seemed to eat up the very shadows that fell on the sands and on the burning rocks. "You haven't touched water for two hours, I think. One really needs water in this heat."

Darcy rolled bloodshot eyes at him, without a reply, and then Geraldi saw that the strong arms of the man were trembling as he supported himself on them.

Geraldi himself fell back a little with his wounded companion, took his canteen, unscrewed the cap, drew the cork, and put to his lips. Darcy drank deep. Afterward, the very effort of raising his head made him sway in the saddle heavily; or perhaps it was the sudden effect of so much liquid.

He recovered himself before the steadying hand of Geraldi could reach his shoulder, and looking at Geraldi out of those tortured eyes, he said slowly: "I was plannin' to double cross you, Jimmy!"

"We all plan such things," answered Geraldi. "There's no man in the world who hasn't had some confounded weak, vicious moment. But between the planning and the doing, there's a gap. You never would have done it. Go on, Darcy. We'll sit together in some cool room, one day, and talk about this ride, and sniff the fragrance of the drinks in the air, and try to talk foreign languages to waiters who speak English better than we do. We'll walk under the chestnut trees, and watch the fountains blow into a mist, and see the children running through it like butterflies through a rain. We'll have a thousand lazy, easy days until this little affair, old fellow, will be no more than a bad dream. All of it that will remain real to us will be the bank notes, and the jewels. I tell you, Darcy, that I know the fellow who will give us eighty per cent of their value in the open market, and mighty glad to get them, at that! Go on, Darcy, and never say die until you feel the rattle in your throat."

Darcy grinned as he listened—grinned like a wolf in the hungry time of winter when it lifts its head in the cave and hears the pack far off, in hot cry after meat.

Then, without a word of spoken answer, he spurred the tired horse forward, and got it into a trot.

The afternoon came, and still they led the pursuit. Once Cullen, scanning a sky line behind them with a pair of strong glasses which he carried, declared that he had seen horsemen sweep over a ridge and disappear in the next low ground. But, at any rate, this was their only materialization. It frightened the four fugitives, but it did not bring the Naylors closer.

However, it was almost worse to have the pursuit unseen. For they knew that somewhere in the rear the four parties had joined. Perhaps the best men had

been placed upon the best and greatest-hearted horses to make the final spurt for the capture.

These and many other surmises passed through the minds of the hunted. But of only one thing they never spoke —what would happen if the Naylors actually came up with them!

Twice they made brief halts to permit the horses to graze on the grass and swallow some of the water where they crossed runlets. On these occasions, the men swallowed something, as well, and Geraldi saw that Darcy was helped down from his horse and laid on his back. There he lay with arms thrown out crosswise, in whatever bit of shadow could be improvised for him. Once, for instance, The Lamb held a blanket between him and the sun, while Geraldi swabbed the caked salt from the face and the throat of the hurt man.

Then they would lift him again and place him in the saddle.

Still the Naylors were not in view, and the reason began to be apparent.

Geraldi had insisted on keeping to a straight line of march, no matter what difficulties lay in the way. Over rough and smooth they went, even when long, easy ravines stretched out at only a little angle from the proper point of the compass. Even these he would have none of, but kept strictly to his way.

It had seemed madness to the others, at the beginning. Even The Lamb grew terse and ugly with his idol, but now they were reaping the advantage of his generalship.

For certainly all that could have held up the Naylors and their band of horsemen so long was that they were wasting their energies scouring off on side shoots, sweeping away in the probable and sensible directions which fugitives should have taken.

Even so, it would have been foolish to think that the pursuit was far away. But the sun dropped slowly in the west, lingering with a cruel slowness on its downward path, and at length it was on the horizon, showing purple strata of dust streaked in long, wavering lines across its face. The dusk deepened, the color left the sky, the pale desert stars looked down through the dusty air on the four, and then Geraldi mercifully gave the order to halt.

Cullen and Naylor dropped from their horses as though they had been struck with clubs; Geraldi himself was quickly on the ground, stretching, but Darcy rode straight on.

Geraldi ran after him and headed him back. The man sat as though glued to his saddle!

Naylor came and lifted him from the horse to the ground. There his strength went out of him, and he lay loose as water. When Geraldi lighted a match, the eyes were open, but glazed and fixed as death, horribly bloodshot. So horribly, that it seemed to Geraldi that he could mark the scoring of the individual grains of sand!

Actually, he advanced the light nearer, until he could see the pupils change in size, but never before had he seen such a dreadful and contorted mask of death in life!

He ventured a fire, on the strength of this. Under cover of a nest of rocks in the hollow, the fire was built, additionally screened with blankets, and the coffeepot made to boil over it. The breath of the aroma of that necessary stimulant lifted every head. Even Darcy groaned with a faint pleasure!

Eat he could not, but the coffee gave him enough strength to begin to tremble as he lay, the muscles feebly responding, and in jerks, to the commands of his thoughts and his nerves.

He tried continually to prop himself up, and eventually succeeded in doing so, putting his back against a stone.

Geraldi saw him there, his head fallen over to one side, the deformed hands helpless in his lap, and was reminded of seeing a very old woman from whom

even the resource of knitting had been stolen by blindness!

He went to Darcy and kneeled beside him.

"You'd better lie down, old man," said he. "Then, after a while, you'll be able to eat, and sleep a bit after that!"

"I'll stay here," said Darcy. "I feel more than half a man, sitting up."

He reached out a hand and pawed at Geraldi.

"Jimmy, lemme stay here! It's worse than death, to go on!"

"You wait till the morning," said Geraldi, and he laid a hand upon the forehead of his companion.

There was no fever. Instead, the skin was clammy and cold to the touch. It did not seem that life could inhabit so cold a body as this! So Geraldi found a blanket and wrapped it closely around him.

Cullen, in the meantime, had been watching every procedure with a bitter interest.

He even said to Naylor: "This night tells the tale. If that useless hulk of a Darcy is dragged along with us, we're all dead men to-morrow—dead as Indians would kill us!"

But Naylor did not answer. He spoke to no one now, except Geraldi. For him he worked methodically, patiently, fetching and carrying, tending the fire, the horses. The man was indefatigable, and never a word of despair, or a word of advice, passed his lips.

Only, a little later, he stretched out his long arm and pointed.

Geraldi had come back from the invalid, and now a dimly perceived form wabbled away against the stars, and then dipped out of view below the rim of the hill.

"The man's gone crazy at last," said Cullen sharply. "Now be yourself, Jimmy! Take his share. We'll hand it on, of course, to his heirs—if the ruffian has any! But now that he's out of his head and wandering, let him go, for mercy's sake!"

Neither Naylor nor Geraldi spoke for a moment, and then the former lurched away into the shadows.

"Go slowly, Lamb," called Geraldi softly. "There's no hurry. I've taken the caps out of his cartridges!"

CHAPTER VI.

FALSE FIRE!

PREJUDICE and malice had dulled the perceptions of Cullen.

"What's that?" he asked sharply. "What's that about the caps?"

"You'll understand if you think for a moment," said Geraldi. "Why do you think Darcy stayed with us all day?"

"To save his worthless hide, of course!"

"No, but because he knew I wouldn't let him go. And Naylor wouldn't let him go."

"You leave me out of it, do you?" snapped Cullen. "I'm glad you understand me that well, Jimmy. The fact is, there's no stupid sentimentality about me. I like to look the cards in the face and read my hand for what it's worth. When my time comes to go under, I won't cling to straws but throw my head down and swim deeper to end it quickly."

Geraldi replied, after a moment: "Yes, Harry, yes. I believe that of you!"

"Thanks!" said Cullen, appeased a little. "But seriously, Jimmy, you're making a fool of yourself about a fellow that's not worth saving. Simply low-bred, ignorant, and with a skin that makes the hide of a rhinoceros seem like gauze. There'll be no gratitude in him. I could tell you what he proposed to me the other day when we——"

"Harry," said Geraldi, "I never like reminiscences about what might have been. The facts are generally bitter enough, without the maybes. But just

now, poor Darcy has gone out to kill himself and so take a burden off our hands."

"To kill himself! Darcy! You're mad, Jimmy!"

"Hush!" said Geraldi.

He raised his hand. Out of the distance they heard voices, and one of them the unmistakable growl of The Lamb.

"The Romans were capable of such things," said Geraldi softly. "A few heroes, here and there. But, somehow, I guessed that this poor fellow Darcy had the same mysterious stuff in him. Beyond you and me, Harry. We only peek around the corner at such things, and the world turns unreal when we hear of such men. But they are here about us. Do you know, Harry, that all we appreciate in the people we know is cleverness, hard-headedness, wisdom that can be turned into cash? But the better things, we can't see. Who would have thought that Darcy—"

"To kill himself!" said Cullen. Then he shook his head, and added with great decision. "You're talking through your hat, old fellow. Such things can't be! Not from a Darcy—not from any man I've ever known, as a matter of fact!"

"Not from self-conscious men," said Geraldi. "You and I, for instance, might conceive of such an act, but then we'd begin to do it in the head instead of with the hand, and before long, we'd have tears of self-pity in our eyes. The fault, you may say, of a finer organism, more delicate susceptibilities; but poor Darcy doesn't reach far with his imagination. He's seen his way only a few inches before his nose; generally he's seen opportunities for crime. But now he sees a chance for a great act, also. He doesn't know that it's great. But, dimly, vaguely, he wants to relieve us of the burden of himself."

"Jimmy," said Cullen, "your simple confidence in human nature is touching and amusing—astonishing, more than anything else. I, for one, wouldn't have believed that I could find such a thing in you. But here's Naylor come back. We'll ask this ox what the donkey really was about."

However, there was something about The Lamb, as he strode up to the pair, that forbade immediate question. He remained with them for a moment, and then made and lighted a cigarette. The end of it flared instantly with a long, yellow-red coal, so violently was The Lamb inhaling the smoke!

At last he said: "I got him when he had the gun at his head. I heard the hammer go down—*thud!*"

"Good——" began Cullen.

Naylor turned half toward him.

"Aw, shut up," said he. "I'm talkin' to Mr. Geraldi!"

He continued: "I heard him groan. He turned the cylinder, but before he could try again, I got him. He wabbled like a baby when I touched him. He turned all loose—like a sick kid that——"

The Lamb hurled his cigarette butt far from him and it fell against the face of a rock with a splashing of bright sparks.

"I had to carry him back. He begun to choke. He cried. This here—this Darcy, I mean to say—he cried!"

Again he stopped. They could hear him breathing hard.

"I laid him down where he was before. He's pretty comfortable, I guess, now. Maybe he feels better. I been explaining to him about the way you feel—I mean, that we're all one gang—like one body, you might say—and you the head—takin' care of us all. Would a man want to lose a leg or an arm? No more you want to lose one of us! I told him he wasn't no burden. We'd bring him through. We all three stood solid on that! All three of us!"

As he said this, he turned suddenly and fiercely on Cullen.

"Very well," said the latter coldly.

"Of course the majority always rules—particularly when it includes the captain general!"

He walked off into the night as he said this, and The Lamb stared after him for a moment. Then he added to Geraldi:

"Maybe you better not go talk to him, just now. I'm gunna get him to eat, pretty pronto."

"I won't go near him, you're much better for him than I possibly could be. I never could have put things so well to him as you've done, Lamb. I'm proud of you."

"Proud of me?" asked Naylor. "Are you?"

He laughed, and the laughter had such a foolish sound that it sobered him at once.

"I'll get him to eat something, pretty soon. Then maybe he'll sleep. What I mean is, about you going, it would get him pretty excited. He says he knows you know he was no good, but fought for him, anyway. He don't understand. That's what busted him up and made him want to shoot himself—to get himself off of our hands. And when he found out that it was you that had taken the caps out of his cartridges, that was what broke him down, and made him like a kid in my arms, carryin' him back. Mind you, Jimmy, he ain't been much before this. But afterwards, hands or no hands, you watch his dust!"

He concluded, philosophizing: "The things you don't expect. They're what cut the closest to the quick. The punch out of the dark. The hundred dollars from the gent you expect will laugh in your face. The buckin' hoss that one day goes smooth——"

He turned away, and disappeared, the darkness soaking him up, as water soaks up a handful of sand.

Then Geraldi sat down and locked his hands about his knees, and looked up at the desert stars thinking of many a strange night on land and sea, but none which ever had brought to him a thing as great and as strange as this. He pondered The Lamb and Darcy, as twisted as a knot in a tree with sin, and as hard with vice. He thought of Cullen, but there he began to frown at the darkness and shake his head.

Harry Cullen, in the meantime, had recuperated quickly from the shock of that revelation concerning Darcy. He had looked upon the man as a worm and a tool for so long, however, that he could not learn to readjust himself and look up to a new soul.

He did not understand that transformations are, by the grace of Heaven, possible even in sinful man, but that he was himself, he felt all other men to be. Therefore, he dismissed Darcy with the single, sneering word under which he included all actions of generosity, self-sacrifice, noble goodness: "Sentimentality!" said Cullen, and walked on into the darkness.

He took from his pack a blanket and continued on his way, for he had made up his mind what he must do.

His intentions, he assured himself, had been good. He had resisted the first temptation and spurned it from him. He had made the long ride with honest integrity of purpose. He had endured everything until the point came when he made sure that they were about to be ruined by having a leaden weight tied about their necks. But this was as far as any man could go, and no farther. To endure more would be to place himself in that category which he most scorned and laughed at.

A sentimentalist he would not be!

He had chosen the place even when they were pitching camp that night.

For, two hills behind the hollow where they camped, arose a taller hill. And to the farther side of this he went. He passed some dead brush, and from this, with as little noise as possible, he picked off some branches which broke

easily beneath his hand. Two or three thorns pricked his skin, but he thought nothing of these.

He had enough with him for his purpose when he came to the appointed spot.

First he scanned the countryside all around him, making sure that though there were a few hills loftier than the one he stood on, yet over two thirds of the horizon could easily view his signal.

Then he arranged his heap of wood and lighted the dead leaves which were to kindle the sticks.

Leaves and wood flared up with a strange swiftness, as though they had been soaked with oil, and the suddenness of the flame and the height to which its head rose and stood nodding in the air filled him with terror, for suddenly it seemed to him that the shadow of Geraldi was behind him, that the terrible youth had followed him, well divining his purpose, and now, if he turned, he would see the flashing smile of Geraldi—the last thing he ever would view upon this earth!

The illusion was so strongly persistent that he jerked his head about and gasped with relief when he saw that the hillside was naked about him.

Then, with the blanket, he masked the flames three times, and three times let it shine forth again, loosing the brilliance to penetrate far off.

Somewhere among those hills, he could swear, there were eyes watching which would not miss the winking of the light. Yet he would not rest content with signaling once.

Again he made the fire blink thrice, then, in feverish, breathless haste, he scattered the small, flaming embers and hastily stamped them out. Still he worked, kicking and stamping, until he was tired.

At last he stopped, and breathed deeply with relief, while the chill of the evening wind passed across his face.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT KIND OF A PROMISE?

WHEN Cullen came back, he found that Geraldi, in the dimness of the starlight, was busily improvising a horse litter out of two straight boughs which he had cut in the hollows and between which he was weaving a network of ropes. Naylor helped clumsily in the work, but when Cullen offered his assistance, Geraldi pointed out that the thing was nearly completed.

"You could light a match, though," suggested the leader, "and hold it for this last couple of knots."

Cullen obediently dropped to one knee and lighted the match, cupping his hands to shield the weak flame from the hand of the night wind.

"Hello," said Naylor, as Geraldi rapidly secured the last rope-ends, "you've singed your fine new boots, ain't you, Cullen?"

The match dropped from Cullen's hands.

"The boots?" said he, scratching another match. "Yes, I was fool enough to stand in too close to the fire, this evening."

When the second match was lighted, he was on both knees, and the boots were out of sight; Geraldi, busily finishing his work, seemed to pay no attention, however, and for this Cullen was profoundly thankful, for he knew that out of small things Geraldi could draw great conclusions.

"How are the horses?" asked Geraldi, rising to his feet.

"The gray mare is still tucked up pretty bad," said Naylor. "I don't think she'll carry more'n her own weight, to-day. The rest of 'em are pretty good. They're eating, and that's something."

"Everything!" said Geraldi. "As long as a horse will eat it will run!"

He whistled, and the pulse of galloping hoofs swept rapidly up to them.

The stallion halted at the side of his master, and Geraldi ran his hand along the flank of his horse.

"He feels this business," said Geraldi, "but he's still iron. Lamb, go wake up poor Darcy and tell him we're starting. Cullen, will you help me tie this litter between a pair of the horses?"

Cullen did not grumble. His interest in the escape had been lost a little earlier in the evening, so that now he entered no further protest against the waste of time and effort over the wounded man. But when he heard Geraldi singing softly to himself as the horses were saddled, Cullen broke out: "Jimmy, I think, after all, you actually enjoy this business."

"Who wouldn't?" asked Geraldi. "If it hadn't been for Darcy, this would have been a poor show, a hollow show, old fellow. We would have been out of touch with our Naylor friends long ago, and then you'd have nothing but a dull party to remember, Harry. We'd feel like robbers."

"And how do we feel now?" asked Cullen curiously.

"Why, like gentlemen adventurers, buccaneers, at least. Let's get Darcy stretched on this litter, and then off we go."

"Why hurry?" said Cullen, cautious, but eager to make his point. "You understand, Jimmy—the horses fagged, all of us dead tired. Why not risk a few hours' rest? After all, we'll have a better chance of making time, and the Naylors can't smell us out in the dark of this night."

"Distance is the best cure for the Naylor disease," replied Geraldi. "We'll march!"

Rapidly they concluded their preparations, the tired horses were gathered, and Naylor and Cullen lifted the sick man onto the litter.

Over the next ridge they climbed, and now for the first time Geraldi varied from his plan of keeping to a straight line of direction from the first to the last. Instead, he slanted the party up a long, gradually rising gorge.

The air freshened as they went, and when they climbed out of the headlands at the top of the gorge, fresh wind was blowing against them. The stars, too, were more brilliant overhead; a fragrance of the pure pines sifted through the atmosphere; and to the right hand they saw what seemed to be a mist rising darkly from the earth.

It was the desert and its enveloping, choking dust, as they could guess, but here the rain had fallen recently. Water was heard trickling near by.

"Where's Cullen?" asked Naylor, looking back.

"He's fallen behind," said Geraldi.

"A fine time to fall behind! I'll give him a call."

"You have good lungs, Lamb?"

"The best you ever heard. Listen!"

"You could shout like thunder, but Harry won't hear you."

"What d'you mean by that, Jimmy?"

"That he's gone on the back trail to find your people."

"Go after him, Jimmy!" said Naylor through his teeth. "You can catch him with the black hoss. Go after him, and bring back his scalp, the low skunk! I knew it when I first laid eyes on him. I knew it. I was ready to believe it from the beginning—but he was with you, Jimmy! That's why I never let myself think too much."

"He's gone," said Geraldi, almost sadly. "There was the weak spot in the rope, but still we're not dropped over the cliff. We'll go on, old-timer. We're not beaten until the last card falls in this game!"

The hills through which they traveled now were difficult enough, sown with rocks, steep-sided, but the horses took to their work more kindly, reaching their heads at the grass which their hoofs were crushing, lifting their crests, snorting to clear their noses of the des-

ert dust, shaking themselves like dogs out of water.

"Watch the horses," said Geraldi. "They know that we have another chance."

The answer came from Darcy, in the form of a heavy groan; then he broke into an excited chattering.

"Out of his head, complete," said Naylor.

"He'll come back again," replied Geraldi. "He was cold as ice, and I'd rather have the fever than the cold."

"I'll tell you," said The Lamb. "I've seen 'em before like this, and if we don't get him to cover and quiet before the day's out, my money goes down that he's a dead man for sure!"

"Man, man," said Geraldi, with his first touch of impatience, "don't you see that that's the chief reason I've pushed forward to-night? That and the burned boots?"

"Burned boots?" asked Lambert Naylor. "I don't foller that."

"He was never close enough to our own fire to singe them. I was sure of that. How were they singed? By another fire. Why another fire? Well, old son, fire light can be seen a long distance, you know, on a night like this."

"Why didn't you smash his head in?" exclaimed the giant. "Why didn't you hand him over to me and let me wring his neck?"

"He's dead, he's dead," said Geraldi. "Forget about him. He's behind us like dust in the wind. Listen!"

They both bent their heads, and heard distinctly, behind them, the neighing of a horse; almost immediately afterwards, they were aware of a distant roaring.

"Hosses comin' through a canyon," diagnosed The Lamb. "We better move, Jimmy, because they're after us. That Cullen has met 'em, and he's turned in news that's worth his board and keep."

They put the horses to a jog. Anything else was impossible, so long as they had the litter suspended between the pair, and as they rose over a swale of ground, Geraldi heard the roar of many galloping hoofs in the distance.

All the lower hills behind them were black mounds revealing nothing, but he could guess the very faces of the fierce riders.

They pushed forward down the slope, a groan breaking from delirious Darcy every step of the way.

It was The Lamb who called out suddenly and pointed to the right; then Geraldi saw the sharp ridge of the roof of a house.

He did not hesitate. There was no possibility of keeping on with Darcy and escaping at the pace to which his sufferings confined them. So Geraldi swung to the side and drew up the horses in front of a typical squatter's shack.

He was out of the saddle and had jerked the door open in a trice, when a voice drawled in the darkness: "I got a line on you, friend, and if you don't back out faster'n you came in, I'm likely to——"

Geraldi did not back out. Instead, he slithered into the darkness of the room.

"Where did you——" began the proprietor, and then there was the brief sound of a scuffle. Mr. Naylor, listening attentively, smiled with grim reminiscence.

But a match now spurted blue fire.

Naylor, looking in, saw that Geraldi held a gun under the chin of a little, scrawny fellow.

"Murder?" said the householder calmly. "Or might it be just robbery? If it's murder, they ain't enough fight in me to give you no good time, and if it's robbery, I gotta confess that I feel a tolerable lot of sympathy for you poor gents. You mean well. You wanta make a large job out of this here, but you can't carve a man-sized statue out of a hickory nut; and you can't pick up money where they ain't more than a

handful of loose change. Right trousers' pocket, if you want that."

"Do you hear me?" asked Geraldi.

"As keen as though I had owls' ears," said the other. "Sure I hear you, partner!"

"I have this gun under your chin not to squeeze money out of your hide, but to get a promise from you."

"Hey!" said the other. "Promise? Promise? What kind of a promise? I'd rather give away a gold watch than a promise!"

"Bring in Darcy," said Geraldi, and Naylor carried the wounded man into the room.

The rancher looked at the wound with an indifferent eye.

"He's feelin' kind of flabby," said he, and that was all.

"Now," said Geraldi, biting his lip as he saw that his stern measures were accepted by the man without the slightest show of emotion. "Now, my friend you——"

"Gleason is the name, partner. What's yours?"

"Geraldi," said the other, at a venture, in striving to impress his host.

He saw the shoulders of Gleason twitch back, as his eyebrows raised.

But he merely said: "Geraldi? Seems like I may've heard it, somewheres, but I ain't sure. Was you playin' the lead-in' parts for the stock company that was over to Rawhide last winter?"

Geraldi chuckled.

"Whether you know me or not," said he, "I think I know you, Gleason. That is to say, I'll trust you as far as I can see you, to-night. Now, then, a score or so of armed men are riding this way as fast as galloping horses will bring them. I want your promise that you'll let us hide my friend here—say, up that ladder and in the loft?"

He pointed to a ladder made of two straight saplings, leading from a corner to a trap door in the ceiling.

"And when they come, not say nothin'?" asked Gleason, with a glint in his eye.

"I'll be outside the rear window, to encourage you with a bullet or two, if you don't do right," said Geraldi. "Will you give me your word, however?"

"A word and a gun," said Gleason, "ought to be enough to hold me. All right, Mr. Geraldi. You have my word."

CHAPTER VIII.

DANGER RIDES BY.

NOW up to the loft with him!" said Geraldi, turning to big Naylor.

"Suppose he's trapped there, Jimmy?"

"As well be trapped in a room as ridden down in the open air," said Geraldi.

So saying, he took the feet of the wounded man, while The Lamb took the shoulders, and together they drew him up the ladder and passed with him into the loft above. Only once did Geraldi stop in the ascent, and this was when Gleason moved as though to leave the room below, but he caught the eye of Geraldi, and remained steadfast, with a faint grin.

So Geraldi passed his share of the burden to the capable strength of Naylor and returned down the ladder to the floor below. The Lamb followed almost at once, to report that he had found clean straw above, and had stretched Darcy upon it.

His very words were interrupted by the clanging of armed hoofs on rocks, a sound that rang sharply from the outer night, though still at a distance.

"Get the horses, Lamb," directed Geraldi. "Take the black and ride him."

"And you?" asked Naylor, frowning.

"I'll stay here, but you get on with the horses, and try to make a detour and come back."

"You stay here?" said Naylor. Then he nodded: "I stay on, too. I don't care any more about 'em than you do. What comes your way can come mine and——"

"Get out!" commanded Geraldi sharply. "Get out, climb on my horse, and ride as if the fiend were after you. Go on, man! They're coming after you like a whirlwind. Ride like mad. Never look behind you. You'll have a horse that can't be caught. If the worst comes to the worst, you can cut the led horses loose and go on safely. But try to keep the whole band together, because that will make our friends behind you think that we're still riding together, all three of us. You'll drag them off on a wild-goose chase, and before they come again on the back trail, I'll have Darcy more than half well, and out on the road once more. But circle back if you safely outrun them, as you may do when every horse has an empty saddle except the black. Go on, man. No talk! No talk!"

He headed Naylor to the door, where the giant paused again, his face filled with doubt; but eventually he allowed himself to be persuaded out and, flinging himself into the saddle, he started off with all the led horses rattling around him over the stones, and thudding on the grassy ground as they went.

Mr. Gleason, who had lighted a lamp and now held it in a corner, so that no light from it might reach the door, remarked to Geraldi: "These gents that are after you, what do they want? The blood out of your pocket, or the blood out of your heart?"

"They want both," said Geraldi.

He stepped to the table and from his trousers pocket he brought out a handful of jewels. Green, and red, and blue, and pure crystals of undiluted light, they spun across the table top. One of them rolled off and dropped to the floor.

Gleason, with a gasp, picked it up and replaced it on the table, while Geraldi smiled at him.

For the little man's ironical composure and faint smile of ridicule had been quite altered by the sight of this burning handful of treasure. He seemed to be holding the lamp so that his own mortification and greed could be read more clearly.

"Look, Gleason," said Geraldi. "There's the board bill in advance for my friend upstairs, and for me."

Gleason looked sharply at him, greed overcoming even his wonder as he stared at his companion.

"I mean it," said Geraldi. "We have plenty more of the same," he added frankly, "but that's a good deal more than the Naylors would give you."

"The Naylors?" said Gleason.

"You never heard of them, either, did you?"smiled Geraldi.

Gleason swallowed with difficulty, but while his absent gaze dwelt on Geraldi and on the distance behind that young man, his free right hand gathered in the jewels from the table top.

He pocketed them, and then stepped back into a corner of the room with the lamp still held straight before his face. It made him look pale, and his skin somehow seemed to glow with the reflected light.

Geraldi, on the farther side, stood motionless likewise, but taking note of the room in the peculiarly keen way in which one looks on a place where a crisis is about to be reached. For the storming hoofs of the Naylors' horses swept closer each moment.

And Geraldi saw a small room, with low ceiling that sagged in the center, with tufts of hay sticking down through the big cracks of the attic floor. The floor was merely hard-rolled and stamped earth, a trail several inches deep having been worn from the door to the stove, and again from the stove to the table. About the walls hung some rusted traps, a few cooking utensils near the stove; a bunk was built into a corner, and by the stove appeared a few shelves on which the sacks of cornmeal, together with the bacon, salt, and a few other necessities of the pantry, were

supported above the occasional dampness of the floor.

This ended the furnishings of the shack, which Geraldi now enumerated one by one, so that he could have drawn a careful description of everything on which his eyes had fallen.

And, in the midst of this absorption, his only real interest was in the onrush of the hoofbeats that roared and echoed from the outside of the house.

"Go to the door," commanded Geraldi, "stand there and hold the lamp!"

The other started, and then obeyed, standing at the door with his hand screening his eyes, as though he were peering out with great curiosity on the procession.

No voice hailed him, though in a land where men are encountered seldom, and far between. But Geraldi, from the farthest corner of the room, saw the shadowy forms fly past, and then the noise of the riders began to die away, sometimes flinging back more loudly, as though they had changed their minds and were returning, then dipping almost out of hearing behind a hill, and rearising faintly on the farther slope.

So that current of danger flowed away across the hills, and grew fainter and fainter.

At last, the little man turned from the door and came back to the table, with his lamp.

"I suppose you'll want me to turn my pocket inside out, now, Mr. Geraldi?" said he.

"Keep what you have," said Geraldi. "I don't grudge it to you. You'll have more, Gleason, if everything goes well here for Darcy."

"I guess that I've got all of the names, now," said Gleason. "You don't hold nothing back from me, Mr. Geraldi. It's almost as though you figgered that I'd be a dead man, before long, and so it didn't matter what I knew."

Geraldi shrugged his shoulders.

"Did any of those riders swing in close when they saw you with the lamp standing there?"

"None of 'em," answered Gleason. "And that was a good dodge, too. To make 'em think that I was just drawed out of my bed, as you might say, to see the noise that was goin' by! I reckon that they won't puzzle none over me. They won't be likely to wonder if I had something worth seeing behind this door of mine."

He laughed contentedly as he said this, and his eyes sharpened so that he had an uncanny resemblance to a fox.

A groan came to them from overhead.

"Start up the fire, will you?" said Geraldi. "I'll go up and look to him. When you get some water heated, I wish you'd bring it up to me. His wounds ought to be dressed again."

The other nodded, turning toward the stove, and Geraldi straightway climbed the ladder to the attic.

There, by lantern light, he worked for a long hour over Darcy, using the heated water which his host presently brought to him.

He found Darcy in a bad condition. The wound along his side had begun to bleed again owing to the jogging he had received in the horse-litter. The main bandage had to be taken off, the wound washed, and then the bandage replaced, dragging it tightly around the chest; and Darcy, conscious again, but tortured beyond endurance as the cloth gripped the inflamed flesh, moaned with agony.

However, once the bandage was in place, its own pressure helped to numb the pain. Food the sufferer could not touch as yet, but a pint of coffee went down his throat, and then he lay clear-eyed for a moment, smoking the cigarette which Geraldi had made for him.

At last he said: "Well?"

"We're lying up for a while," said Geraldi. "The Lamb has baited the pack and brought it on into the mountains——"

"Him? Naylor? For me?"

"He's done it. He's on the black, so there's no chance that he'll be captured, if that's what worries you."

"He done that!" said Darcy slowly, breathing out a great cloud of smoke. "Well, I gotta believe you! He's taken them on?"

"They rode past the door of this shack, Darcy!"

The wounded man groaned, but it was not physical pain that forced out the sound. It was merely enormous relief of the spirit.

The cigarette fell almost at once from his hand.

"I'm gunna be able to sleep, then," he said. "I'm gunna be able to sleep."

Geraldi trod on the fuming butt and waited, pulling the lantern away so that it might not trouble the eyes of the tired man.

After a moment, when he was almost certain that Darcy was asleep, he heard the other mutter: "Jimmy!"

At once he leaned over.

"Jimmy—nobody else! Nobody else in the world white. Only you, partner!"

Geraldi smiled in the dimness but did not speak.

Once more the eyes of Darcy closed, but when he spoke again it was to say:

"Them fountains under the chestnuts—them fountains blowin' into mist—where might they be, Jimmy?"

"Across the sea, old-timer."

"Across the sea!" said Darcy. "You reckon that we're gunna see 'em, Jim?"

"Of course we are."

"Gosh," murmured Darcy, "how I been dreamin' about that, and thinkin' of it. I'd stand there and let the mist blow into my face, down my throat, into my eyes. I'd—I'd——"

His voice failed, and he was presently breathing deeply.

Geraldi, turning from him, climbed down the ladder to the room below, and found Gleason frying bacon and corn pone in the same pan.

CHAPTER IX.

A PHILOSOPHER UNDER A ROOF.

THEY ate on the scarred table in the center of the room.

"Suppose they was to come back?" asked Gleason, as he filled his pipe, at the end, and pushed the tin plate and cup aside to give himself elbowroom.

"I take things as they come," said Geraldi.

"Do you?" said the other.

He closed his eyes as he lighted his pipe, puffing rapidly, so that a dense white fog formed in front of his face. This he at last brushed aside with his hand, or rather, cleaved a way through it, so that he could peer out at Geraldi. Never did he look more like a fox than at this moment.

"Yes," said Geraldi. "There's no use worrying before the dice have stopped rolling."

"There's some men," said the other, "who ain't happy when the dice are still. They always got to see them roll."

He broke off, to add immediately: "Suppose you'd come down from up above and found me gone?"

"I'd have looked for you at once," said Geraldi.

"Where?"

"Left the cabin and lain down on the ground to try to spot you against the stars, going over one of the hills."

"And if that missed?"

"I would have run straight back."

"Back where?"

"In the direction from which the riders came. Of course, if you were gone, it would be to get in touch with them—signal them in some way—with fire, I suppose. You'd know that I would suspect that. So you'd take the back trail first, and then make a detour."

"To which side?"

"I don't know."

"So your chances wouldn't be very good, partner?"

"Two out of three," said Geraldi with his smile. "I'm a lucky man."

The other nodded, with rather a grim look.

"Lucky?" said he. "And yet I bet you ain't got a thing in the world except the money that you've stole!"

"What's money?" answered Geraldi. "I generally have had enough to spend, and as for hoarding it, I'm not interested."

"This here Darcy, he's an old friend of yours, and that's why you stick with him?"

"He's a friend," said Geraldi.

"He don't amount to shucks," replied Gleason in an even tone.

"Doesn't he?"

"He don't. I seen his face before."

"You know him?"

"I know his kind. They ain't more than twenty kinds of faces in the world. There ain't hardly that many. You get to know the types of 'em, after a while. This Darcy—he don't amount to shucks."

Geraldi was silent. But at last he asked: "Why am I taking care of him, then?"

The little man shook his head.

"I can't quite say. They's some folks got no more heart than a tiger, but they're always tryin' to argue themselves into havin' one. Like the gunmen that always would buy a fine funeral for them they had shot in self-defense. Maybe you're that kind."

He went on: "Or maybe it's just an idea stuck back in your mind like the lessons that kids get out of books, about never slacking on a partner."

"That idea doesn't please you, Gleason?"

Why, the fact is that you can teach a mule to do a lot of good things, like pullin' a load, and such. And so can you teach a human to do good things, too. But does the mule love the load that he pulls, or pull it because he loves you? And what about the humans, then?"

At this, Geraldi bit his lip and glanced away.

"I touched you a mite that time," said Gleason with composure. "But still I don't know you. It would take a mite of time to know you."

He rose and gathered up the dishes.

"Are you going to wash these tonight?" asked Geraldi, wearied.

"Sure. They might come back before you expect 'em. They shouldn't find two sets of plates dirty. And I got some warm water left. You set still and rest your feet. I'll do the work. I think better when I got my hands busy."

"Do you expect them back, Gleason?"

"Most certain sure!" said he. Geraldi stared at the stove. "I think you may be right," said he. "I'm practically certain that you're right, in fact."

"Of course, I'm right," said Gleason.

"You'd better hide the jewels I gave you, then. You might be searched."

"What difference? If they do any searching', they ain't gunna overlook the attic upstairs, and if they find him there, I reckon that they'll leave no more'n a cinder of this here house."

Geraldi nodded, accepting the truth of this statement of probability and wondering more than ever at his host.

"How long have you been out here, Gleason?" he asked at last.

"Nigh onto long enough."

"Tired of it?"

"No, I mean nigh onto long enough to get used to it."

"And how long is that?"

"Twelve year."

"And only beginning to grow used to it?"

"Why, the fact is," said Gleason, "that I come out here for adventure and a hard life, and I've had both and told myself that I liked it and was happy. But of course I wasn't."

"Why not?"

"Who is happy," said Gleason. "They ain't much happiness in the world, except for chasin' after the things that

you'll never get, and if you could get 'em, you wouldn't be happy chasin' 'em."

"What about married men, the wives they love, their children, and homes?" asked Geraldi.

"I kinda laugh when you say that," said Gleason. "Wives and children and homes, they don't make a man happy more'n one minute a week. But a man's like a hoss. He gets used to one place, and if he ain't happy in it, he's just plain miserable out of it. Married men is like hosses that been worked a long time in the same span. They don't like each other. But they can't get on without each other. And you'll see 'em in the pasture, the off hoss always on the off side, and the nigh hoss always on the nigh side. Same way with men and wives. And yet you ask me a question like that! But you're still tolerable young, even if you are Geraldi."

The latter watched and listened, lounging on the bunk in the corner of the room, and slowly smoking a cigarette.

"So you got used to this place at last, Gleason?"

"I got used to it, till you come flingin' in, and make me smell the mountains, as you might say, and the out trail, and the smoke of the mornin' over the forests. But after you get along, I'll settle down again, most likely.

Geraldi fell into a half sleep, like the sleep of a wolf. For, as he dozed on the bunk, first one eye and then the other opened and looked at Gleason, and always at him, and at no other thing in the room. Hardly a second passed without that surveillance coming dreamily to bear on his host.

Of this Gleason became aware as he softly wiped the last dish dry. He made a sudden motion with the tin plate that was in his hand. The flash of the pan under the lantern light brought Geraldi like a tiger to his feet; but he dropped the half-drawn revolver back into its holster.

Yet he remained erect for an instant, keen, alert, breathing danger.

"You were about fifty-one per cent dolt, just then," said Geraldi.

"Well," said the other, "the rest of me was philosopher, as they say. And even if I come a tenth part of a second from bein' shot, at least I missed that. So we're all even."

Geraldi turned his back on him and stepped to the door. Then he passed outside it and remained gone for a moment.

When he returned, it was to find his host standing in the middle of the floor, with his eyes wide with inquisitiveness.

Geraldi nodded.

"They're coming back," said he.

"Shall we take him outside and lay him in the brush?" asked Gleason.

"Exposure might kill him as effectually as bullets," said Geraldi. "And if they remain until the morning, he's a dead man, anyway. No, we'll let him stay where he is."

He looked earnestly at his host.

"I want to believe in you, Gleason," he said. "I want to think you'll keep the promise that you made to me a little while ago."

The foxy face of Gleason wrinkled with interest and secret amusement. He merely nodded for an answer.

"But all the while that you're in here with them, I'll be out somewhere on the watch—outside the window—outside the door—somewhere watching and listening. They may only come for coffee and leave again. But by the tickling in my spinal column, Gleason, I think that there'll be much more trouble than that!"

CHAPTER X.

THE PLAGUE!

SAFELY outside the house, Geraldi watched the cavalcade of shadows pour up from the next gully and sweep toward the shack, and never did flight appear to him so logical and tempting as

at this moment. Yet he remained close by, until it was too late to flee, for the Naylors were everywhere about the house with their horses. Only they did not think of looking inside the dense bush which sprouted just beside the window of the house, allowing Geraldi to stand there at his ease and look in on all that happened within.

They were all there—Harry Naylor in executive command, as it were; but, astonishing to see, old Pike Naylor himself was with the party, his long, hooked nose looking blue with night-cold and fatigue. The grin which toothlessness had given to him was broader than ever, more wolfish.

Twenty men packed the little cabin, or tended the horses outside it.

But looking through the brush at the bronchos, it was easy for Geraldi to understand why the clan had given up the pursuit for the time being. For the animals were completely spent. It was not necessary to have full daylight to examine them. The sight of their hanging heads and their tucked-up bellies against the stars was enough.

Inside the shack, moreover, Geraldi was seeing hollow-eyed men, unshaven, dusty, their eyebrows whitened. They demanded coffee, loudly. Half a dozen threw themselves down on the floor, exhausted; the others moved restlessly about, cursing, raging.

They had ridden furiously forward, it appeared, with the horses of the fugitives, as they believed, just before them. But in spite of their efforts, they had been hopelessly distanced by the horses led by The Lamb.

"They went as light," said one of the crew, "as if they didn't have men in the saddles!"

Cullen came in at that moment.

"One saddle was empty, at any rate," he said.

They looked at him with grave, sour attention. He had from them the reception which a traitor usually receives, but, nevertheless, they had to respect his information. And Cullen carried himself very well, with a haughty indifference to the opinions of the other riders.

"What saddle?" asked Harry Naylor.

"The one that was holding Darcy. He wasn't capable of riding. Remember that Geraldi was making a horse litter to carry him along."

"Why should Geraldi have done it?" asked some one. "If he's the monster that gents say, why should he have done that?"

"Why," said Cullen, "it isn't that he cares about Darcy, but it's his pride to be able to tell the world that he got away from all the Naylors without losing a man. The Old Nick always has been credited with pride, you know."

Gleason, in the meantime, had received his guests with his usual foxlike calm; he had built up the fire and was heating water for coffee in a tin bucket, the only receptacle he owned large enough to make a drink of coffee for so many guests. And now, as Cullen spoke, a heavy groan sounded from the attic above.

It struck all the Naylors silent, it made Geraldi turn his head and mark down a horse which stood with a higher head than the others. Flight was his only resource, now, unless Gleason were able to produce a miracle.

But the latter was blandly stirring quantities of coffee into the water in the bucket on the stove when Harry Naylor clapped a hand on his shoulder.

"Who's that up the ladder?" he asked.

"That? Brother of mine," said Gleason.

Geraldi started and listened more closely. He had had his doubts of Gleason until this moment. Now his faith was restored, but he failed to see how the little man possibly could avoid a catastrophe.

"A brother?" said Harry. "Sick?"

"Yeah. Mighty sick."

"You'd better have a look at that sick man," said Cullen. "Bullet wounds make a man groan and a good deal quicker than sickness!"

On the heel of his words a louder and heavier groan broke from Darcy, and the blood of Geraldi ran cold.

His hands were tied, but he had a fiendish desire to shoot Cullen and Pike Naylor from the window and so gain a double requital for the death which now stared Darcy in the face.

"I'll have a look up there myself," said Harry Naylor. "Why would you shove a brother of yourself into the attic, like that?"

"Because the flies bother him a lot less up there where it's dark."

Harry Naylor, his foot on the ladder, paused.

"Why do the flies bother him?"

"Well, he's sort of broke out," said Gleason.

"Aye, with bruises and wounds," said Cullen. "By Jupiter, I begin to be sure that Darcy is up there. It stands to reason, because I tell you that he couldn't possibly have been taken along at the pace they were going to-night. Darcy's here, and only Geraldi and The Lamb are with the horses!"

This accurate diagnosis was received without a word by the Naylors, though several of them lifted their heads and stared earnestly at the dark opening in the ceiling.

"Mighty horrible thing to look at, his face just now," said Gleason. "All kinds of pockety, d'ye see?"

He made a grimace as he said it.

"Pockets?" asked Pike Naylor, coming out of the evil dream in which he had been lost. "Just what sort of pockets?"

"Why, it'd take your appetites to know what they're like! He come down quick, with a rash and a fever, a few days back. The light down here bothered him a lot. He begun to puff and to swell. Then he busted out with these here sores that I was talkin' about, and mostly he's out of his head——"

There was a faint shout, and then another groan from the man above them.

Harry Naylor went straight up the ladder, and reached for the edge of the opening, saying: "We'll have a look and see!"

"Hold on!" called Pike Naylor suddenly.

Harry looked down.

"What for?"

"It sounds mighty like smallpox!"

Harry Naylor did not wait for a second cautioning. He almost fell down the ladder.

"Smallpox!" he shouted. "You sneaking coyote, why didn't you tell me what it was?"

But Gleason stood with mouth agape.

"Smallpox?" he said. "And me never having had it? Never bein' vaccinated, either! Smallpox! And me takin' care of him every day!"

He had a big iron spoon in his hand, with which he had been stirring the coffee into the heating water, and now the spoon fell from his hand, clattering on the floor.

It was like a drum signal of alarm, the whole crowd rushing for the door of the shack, Gleason among them, his voice shrilling out as if in wildest alarm: "Smallpox!"

When the exodus of cursing, raging men had been completed, only one figure remained, and it was that of Cullen.

He remained in the center of the floor, looking up at the trap in the ceiling quizzically.

"Come out of that, Cullen!" shouted Harry Naylor. "The longer you breathe that filthy air, the bigger chance you have of catching the disease, and of spreading it, too. Come out of that, will you? Or else we won't have you along with us!"

Cullen shook his head.

"This is an odd thing," said he. "I never heard of a man catching smallpox

out in the mountains like this—I'm going up to look and satisfy my own eyes!"

He began to climb the ladder, but made only one step, when Geraldi saw him shudder convulsively. Hastily he returned to the floor and went toward the door. The horrible fear of the unknown had pushed him back.

Outside the door, Gleason's voice could be heard raised in complaint:

"He's my own brother! What'm I gunna do? I never guessed smallpox! We'll both die, and not a soul——"

"Keep away from me, you poison little skunk. Keep away, or I'll shoot. You been around him—you been havin' your hands on him—and—and you was gunna make us coffee! Get out of my sight; it sure makes me sick to look at you!"

Here Gleason stumbled through the door as though he had been flung bodily back into the shack.

He sank onto an improvised stool and sat there with his face buried in his hands, in full view of the door, while Geraldi heard Harry Naylor giving brisk orders to mount.

They had to get to food for the horses, food for the men, and then they would take up the long trail again. Wearily the Naylors trooped back to the saddle. Geraldi heard the stirrup leathers creak, the horses groan as the riders mounted. Some of the horses were so thoroughly exhausted that they staggered to the side drunkenly as the men swayed up to the saddles.

"Feed them the rowel till we get over to the Wilton place," Harry Naylor directed. "We want to be on the trail again before the middle of to-morrow morning. Look alive, boys. You know what hangs on this and——"

His speech was cut into by demoniacal laughter that rang hollow from the attic where Darcy lay.

With no more words, the Naylors rode off down the slope and were absorbed among the shadows of the next valley like phantoms riding down into a black sea.

So they were gone, and Geraldi came slowly back into the house.

He found Gleason singing softly as he stirred at the bucket of coffee.

"All this," said Gleason, without turning his head, "and only the pair of us to drink it."

"I can use a quart of it," said Geraldi, "a quart, black and strong! Gleason, that was a fine little show you just acted through!"

"There is some," said Gleason, "that is nacheral born liars, some make pretty good liars with study and practice, and some never amount to nothin' along those lines. But I was a born liar, and I educated myself along them lines. It ain't surprisin' if I was able to bamboozle that crowd! Besides, I looked too small to be tellin' a lie of the size of that one. You take a look at my brother up the ladder, and I'll have the coffee ready by the time that you get back."

Geraldi slipped up the ladder and found Darcy needing no care whatever. He had fallen into a deep sleep. His breathing was so regular that Geraldi knew it would be a different man who awakened the next morning.

So he went back down the ladder to Gleason, and found the little man ladling out big tin cups of his brew with the iron spoon. Steam arose in small wisps from the open faces of the coffee cups, and Gleason was stirring sugar into his portion.

They sat opposite one another at the little table, each busied with his own thoughts.

At length, Gleason took from his pocket the small heap of jewels which Geraldi had given to him, and placed them in front of his guest.

"Why?" asked Geraldi.

"I'll tell you why," said Gleason. "I've had 'em. I've seen 'em. I've

watched 'em sparkle. I'm through with 'em!"

"You don't understand," said Geraldi. "As a matter of fact, there's a tidy little fortune in those stones, Gleason."

"I know," said Gleason. He looked rather wistfully at his guest. "I was once an expert," he added quietly. "Matter of fact, I used to be a collector, and never paid for what I got."

Geraldi smiled, and the little man went on:

"If I had these, what would I do with 'em? Think about night lights and the big spending. I come out here to get away from that. I was away from it, when you come over the sky line and dropped in on me. Take that stuff and shove it deep in your pocket, Geraldi. I never want to see the face of it again!"

Geraldi, without a word, picked up the scattered jewels and made them disappear.

Then he remained for a time quietly sipping his coffee and watching the odd, sharp, foxlike face of his companion.

"Gleason," he said at last, "it begins to look as though I've been a fool from the moment I came into this place and drew a gun on you to the time that I offered you money. Do you forgive me?"

The little man chuckled.

"There you go," said he, "getting sentimental, makin' me into a saint. Matter of fact, I'd've sold you to the Naylors in a minute, most like, if I hadn't been scared that your gun would get me before they got you. Things are even between us, Geraldi. You've had your Darcy saved; I've had my fun!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE NAYLORS RETURN.

EARLY each morning, Geraldi went out on the highest of the nearer hills; at noon, and again in the evening, he was at the same post, scanning the sky line in the hope of seeing some sign of Lambert Naylor and the horses returning toward the Gleason cabin.

So at last, on a day when the sun stood bright and hot in the central sky, it was more dreamlike than real when he saw a small troop of horses clustering about one horseman, and riding across the hills toward him.

He could tell the gait and the form of the black stallion far off; he could tell the massive shoulders of The Lamb still farther, and, therefore, he was waiting with a smile of gratification as the big man rode up. He was mounting the last slope of the hill when Geraldi heard from behind him what sounded like a gunshot, but the wind blew against the noise, and he could not be sure. It might be, however, that Gleason had gone out to try his hand at a random squirrel or at a rabbit that chanced by.

He gave this sound little notice, so delighted was he to see big Naylor come up, waving a hand and shouting greetings.

And Naylor seemed as delighted as he. He sprang out of the saddle as the black horse went to Geraldi like a dog to fawn on its master.

"You're here—Darcy's here—everything's fixed?" asked The Lamb eagerly.

"Everything's fixed. They came back, but they didn't stay long. Gleason was afraid that his brother upstairs had smallpox, and they didn't wait to help the sick man. They ran, and that was that. But you, Lam?"

"I run the hosses pretty hard. Maybe I would've got clean off, except that the gray's a soft beast. She couldn't hold up but buckled, and there I was; and then I seen what looked like a valley cuttin' back into the hills and I ducked the hosses into it, only to find out that it was a box canyon, and I would've had to fit all of the hosses with wings to get 'em over the first cliff. I was about to go and save myself, when all at once I remembered what you thought about the black, and so I didn't run.

"Well, a minute later, the Naylors come by like rockin'-hosses past the mouth of that ravine.

"Not the whole body of 'em, but three split to the side and come galloping into the canyon.

"I seen 'em come, but somehow I didn't have the sense to take a shot at 'em. I just sat there, while they got closer and closer, and finally I was about to send a slug at the nearest one, when they pulled up rein and waited for a minute.

"Why, I could hear their hosses breathe, and there wasn't any real way that they could've missed the seein' of me.

"But somehow they did. They didn't expect to find me there, and so they didn't find me! And after they'd gone, I doubled out of that valley, and into another, and worked back very slow and gradual, until I was pretty well back in the bush.

"While I was out there, I wondered how long they'd go, or if they could give up the trail? But that wouldn't have been likely, I knew.

"I waited for 'em, until I seen 'em duck out into the open again, and they come along pretty easy and gradual. I studied their hosses, and seen three of 'em stumble in a half an hour, by which I knew that there was good deal the matter with them. Anyway, they went past my stand, and when they were gone, I waited a while, and then I come out and back-tracked into the hills, and since that time I've never seen 'em again! You wonder why I didn't get back quicker? Because I made a circle through the hills. The gray mare, she held me up pretty bad. She was lame in her right foreleg. I worked on her and rubbed her, and took it easy, because it seemed a shame to drop a right good mare that might come around. And there she is now—fine and sassy, and the freest on the lead rope of any hoss in the bunch!"

He pointed to her with pride, and she was indeed in fine fettle. As for the rest, they were a little lean of rib and high of back, but they had come through sound and strong.

"And after we left, back come the Naylors to you?" went on The Lamb. "I would've liked to see 'em when they heard about the smallpox! You know why that hit 'em so hard?"

"No."

"Back in the old days, there was a sick hombre come to the place and jus' got started to work on the ranch, when he busted out with smallpox, and five or six men died before the thing was over. How's Darcy now?"

"Sitting up and walking around and ready to ride, but I've been making him take it easy for a while. The time has come now, old son. Away we go, and the rest of the clan will never catch up with us!"

"They been set back," said The Lamb, grinning. "They sure been set back a coupla days. Away we go back to the shack!"

And back they went at a smart gallop, with the led horses prancing, big Naylor on another mount, and Geraldi once more on the back of the stallion.

When they came back to the house, Naylor took the horses to the closed pasture behind it, stripped off the saddles, and turned them loose, while Geraldi went straight on into the house itself.

He called to Gleason as he went: "We've got them back, and not a head lost, Gleason. This will be about the end of the game!"

So he said as he crossed the threshold of the hut, and then saw Gleason picking himself off the floor with crimson streaming down his face!

The little man regained his feet unaided, before Geraldi could come to him.

"Hello, Geraldi," he said, staggering. "We counted chickens just a mite before

they hatched. They nigh to got me, and they certainly have polished off poor Darcy!"

"Darcy! Darcy!" cried Geraldi, startled into one of his rare exhibitions of emotion. "They've got Darcy? But how are you yourself, Gleason? Are you badly hurt?"

"I thought I was dead," said Gleason, dipping a towel into a bucket of water and gingerly washing the stains from his head. "All the thinkin' that I done was that I was dead, leastways. But I seem to come through. I reckon that they could slam me in the head with a bullet, but they couldn't more'n bounce it off my skull, d'ye see?"

He laughed as he said it, the laughter stopping on a wry grimace of pain.

Geraldi looked a him with lessening concern, for it was plain that the tough skull of Gleason had received merely a shock, and no serious wound.

"Will you tell me what happened?" asked Geraldi at last. "And Darcy gone? After all this, Darcy gone?"

"He was walkin' up and down in front of the house," said Gleason. "I was in here rollin' that dough and kneadin' it, and I sings out and tells him that if he'll wash his hands, I'll trust a real delicate job to him. But he ups and says that he can't be bothered with no jobs, when he's just gettin' the taste of the open air into his lungs. I says to him that he's a loafer and no good, and that I wouldn't have him around the place even to do a boy's chores, and he says that the faster he can leave, the more better pleased he'll be; and while we're passin' the time of day like this, free and easy, I sings out to him and I says to him would he fetch me in some wood from the woodpile, and he don't answer me, but pretty soon I hear a thud, like a man had soaked his heel hard into damp clay.

"It has a funny sound to me, that does, and pretty soon, as I'm pushin' my bread into the oven, I think to myself that I'll go and see what it was. I turned around, and there in the door is Darcy standin', out on his feet, his head wabblin' from side to side, an awful thing to see, and a gent on either side holdin' him up. And in front of Darcy there walks another pair, and one of them says to the other: "Slam this gent!" and the other one ups with his gun, as calm as you please, and whangs away, and I catch it in the head, and that's all that I know!"

He finished with a gesture of surrender and an accent of disgust.

"There you are!" said he. "They've got Darcy in spite of all our work. But why did they bring him in here, and why did they take him away with 'em, instead of stickin' a knife clean through him?"

"Because they couldn't find the loot, Gleason! That's the only reason! Because they couldn't find the stuff that we'd carried away, and because Darcy couldn't tell them where it was, no matter what they did to him. D'you see? They walked him back into the shack; they waited till he was back in his senses, which they had more than half knocked out of him. Then they asked him questions, but he could only say that he didn't know. For I was the only man who knew where the loot was cached. That's the reason they've taken him away with them. He'll be the club over my head with which they'll try to hold me up for his share of the stuff, at least!"

He then broke into a great, harsh laughter.

"Do you see, Gleason? Cullen is back with them—a lucky Cullen if he gets away with any of the stuff sticking to his fingers! And now they have Darcy, whose share I'll have to pay down to get his freedom, and the only outstanding loss they'll have will be my third of the game!"

He broke off to help with the bandaging of the head of his friend, and it was

so that The Lamb found them, as he returned from caring for the horses.

The latter was not a man of many words. Therefore, he asked no questions, but used his eyes the more. He did not even ask where Darcy might be, but climbing the ladder to the garret and finding that the other was not there, he descended again, and gave a final thoughtful glance at Geraldi, as the latter finished the bandaging.

After that, Naylor went outside and walked pensively up and down, up and down. He examined the ground, saw certain hoofprints leading off from the house, and even scanned the distant hills in the direction in which they had gone.

As he watched in this manner, out of the nearest gully a horseman arose, weaving his way among the little man-high lodgepole pines. A graceful rider was this stranger, with a five-gallon sombrero high upon his head, and silver conchos down his trouser legs.

As he came up, The Lamb recognized that same handsome Mexican who had appeared in the village where they last had rested. He raised his hat in high salutation as he came nearer. "I've come to talk to Mr. Geraldi," said the Mexican. "Is he in?"

"You've come to talk to Mr. Geraldi, have you?" repeated The Lamb. "I've a mind to wring your neck for you! You're one of those who were here a few minutes ago?"

"Here at this house?"

"Aye, one of them that fetched away Darcy!"

"Of course I am," said the other, well at ease as he answered. "But because we didn't find everything that we wanted, I've been sent back to talk to Mr. Geraldi about getting more!"

The sharp voice of Gleason barked at him from the doorway.

"You'll get no more. Geraldi has finished paying for the dolts that rode with him. He'll now keep what's left as his own!"

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER FROM DARCY.

WHAT'S to be gained by hard talk, offensive talk?" asked the other. "But here's the famous Geraldi himself to answer me! Have you heard me, señor?"

Geraldi came out through the doorway and into the sun, which burned with such a terrible vigor that the Mexican's horse was twitching its withers and hips as though to shrug away some of the constant shower of fiery flakes.

In that sun Geraldi stood bareheaded, with his hands dropping from his hips as he faced the messenger. The Lamb could not see Geraldi's expression, but he could read it as in a mirror by the reaction it caused in the face of the other man. First of all, the gay and insouciant air of the messenger disappeared, his face grew longer, his very color faded decidedly under the silent stare of Geraldi.

At last, that youth said: "What is it that you want, José?"

José was forced to make an empty gesture, to begin with. Then words came haltingly:

"I am only sent, señor!"

"Oh, of course," replied Geraldi. "Only sent. No volition of your own. Why, of course not! Poor José, forced to come here by wicked old Pike Naylor. What is it you want, José?"

The Mexican actually slipped out of the saddle, as though the words of Geraldi had been so many blows. Standing on the ground, he gripped the stirrup leather as though to give himself more courage.

"Señor Geraldi, I was here with the others, but I did not lay a hand on Señor Darcy, nor on Señor Gleason. Señor Gleason will tell you that is true!"

"He didn't have an arm that would reach as long as a bullet out of a gun," said Gleason. "But go on, greaser, and let's hear what you have to say?"

The opprobrious name had no effect upon José; indeed, it was as though nothing existed in the world for him but the coldly concentrated attention of Geraldi.

"Unfortunately," said the Mexican, his uneasy eyes widening and then rolling away from Geraldi toward the horizon, only to return anxiously to the slender youth, "unfortunately, Señor Darcy did not have with him the things which we had hoped to find. Therefore, we took him away with us, after inviting him to remember as much as he could. But he said very frankly that he did not know. Señor Geraldi alone knew!"

"And if I turn over the stuff, you give me Darcy again, in the flesh, living?" said Geraldi.

There was something in his voice that made the messenger turn a paler color than ever.

"Señor," he said, "I am nothing. I am only, as it were, a piece of paper on which a few words are written, but what you have said is true."

"I take the stuff to a certain place. Darcy is produced. I leave the loot. All is well!"

"Exactly so, señor!"

"You'll be carrying some sort of authorization with you, José?"

"Certainly. I have a letter from Darcy."

He took it out at once and tendered it with a low bow. Geraldi, taking it, ripped the envelope open and took out the paper which it contained.

It read, in a great, scrawling, painful hand:

DEAR JIMMY: They have me again, as you know by this time. They got me where I never can get away, and where even you wouldn't have a chance of getting at me. They want to finish me off, of course, and I think that if there was a little less stuff concerned, they'd prefer nailing me to another tree to taking the money that I have which you took from them.

They only ask for my share of it, Jimmy, and if you'll ride in toward San Hernandez with my part of the loot and come to the edge of the marshes, just north of the railroad, they'll produce me out of the brush. I'm to leave the bushes and go forward toward you a hundred yards. Then, one man following behind me, I'll go on to meet you. The man behind me will take the bag from you, and then I'll be free to go on with you.

If they open on you from the brush, they know that the gent that has walked out with me will be pretty sure to die, and to die pronto. That'll be the guarantee, and a pretty good one it ought to make.

This'll take nothing out of your pocket, Jimmy, and it'll turn me loose.

These people keep their word. They've kept it by Cullen, who's still with them and getting along fine with everybody here. Jimmy, I know that I got no right to ask you to do another thing for me, but this is a pick between living or dying pretty hard, and I guess you won't blame me if I ask you this one last favor! I been an anchor for you all the time, and held you up pretty bad, but this will be for the last time.

Thanks for the past, no matter what you do about this. Yours truly,

DARCY.

To this letter a postscript was added in a more rapid, and still more sprawling hand.

P. S. Geraldi, the new wounds have stopped hurting, and it seems to me like all I can feel is the old scars in the middle of my hands.

Geraldi, having finished the letter, then read it aloud to his two companions. The opinion of Gleason was quickly given and sharply to the point.

"Darcy's a chump if he thinks that you'll endanger yourself again for him. He doesn't really think you will. Let him slide, Geraldi, and take what you have, and keep his share for his widow and children, so to speak!"

The Mexican did not speak to influence Geraldi in this decision, but merely turned his dark, haunted eyes on the face of the youth and waited.

Geraldi, whiter with anger than the messenger with fear, walked up and down, biting at his lips.

At last he said: "You're words are

written on paper, José, and I've half a mind to treat you the way one treats worthless paper. But—go back to the Naylors. Tell them that I'm going to think about this for a day or so."

"There will be until to-morrow morning," said the Mexican. "After that, we must go away. There are little troubles with the sheriff of the county; people say that he doesn't approve of armed men riding through his district as we have done. He is apt to make a great disturbance, and my friends wish to return to their own place. But they will wait for you until to-morrow morning!"

Geraldi waved his hand, turned on his heel, and walked quickly into the house, whither Lambert Naylor and Gleason followed him. The Mexican mounted at once, jogged his horse a little distance, and then was seen from the door of the house to fling himself forward along the neck of his mount, and to make it fly down the hillside.

"He's feelin' bullets in the back," said Naylor. "I don't blame him. You looked pretty poison there, chief. Now what?"

"Go down to the marshes," suggested Gleason ironically. "Go down to the swamps for Darcy, and there you'll stand with your money in your hand, and be shot full of holes by the Naylors!"

"They wouldn't do it!" said Lambert Naylor with heat. "They ain't as low skunks as to——"

Gleason raised a withered, bony hand, and Naylor became suddenly silent in the face of this disdainful gesture; as though he well realized that his protest had no background of real importance.

"I won't go to the marshes," answered Geraldi tersely.

The other two were silent, looking at one another in a species of dismay, as though this were the last answer that they had expected from Geraldi, no matter how much they had argued to win him over to that decision.

"Good!" said The Lamb. "I was half thinkin' that I'd have to go down there with you!"

"You'll have to go along with me no place," answered Geraldi.

"We start ridin', then?" asked The Lamb, still somewhat incredulous.

"We start riding."

"Where?"

"Toward San Hernandez."

"San Hernandez!"

"Wasn't that the town that José named?"

"But you said that you weren't going to go there, Jimmy!"

"Not to the marshes, but near the town. Darcy is somewhere close by, of course. And we'll have to hunt for him."

"Jimmy!" pleaded Naylor. "Ain't it better to pay money than blood for a gent like Darcy?"

Geraldi paused to consider this, while he made a cigarette. Then he said at last:

"I don't know. Perhaps you're right."

"Then why not send down the stuff? A lot better that way, Jimmy!"

"Perhaps. But, no doubt, it's a matter of principle with me. I don't mind paying to an honest man, but I hate like the dickens, Lam, to pay to a flock of scoundrels such as most of that troop are. Excuse me. I don't mean to step on your own kin!"

Neither Naylor nor Gleason spoke again to dissuade Geraldi, seeming to know at once that his mind was irrevocably made up. But, after a time, Naylor went into the corral, where he saddled his own horse, and that of Geraldi; these he led out before the shack, and after a time they mounted.

Gleason followed them as far as the door, and there slouched against the jamb.

"If we don't come back," said Geraldi cheerfully to him, "you'll know that we're traveling in another direction,

Gleason, and the horses are yours. If we do come back, whatever we have is yours!"

Gleason grinned.

"If I was a churchman," he said, "I'd take it and build a church, or something. But the way that I am, what could I be usin' money for? I could use some extra socks. Keep that in mind, will you?"

He laughed and waved to them as they started down the hill. And Geraldi and The Lamb, descending the slope, turned at the bottom before they entered the draw, and waved for the last time to the queer, laughing, foxy face in the door of the shack.

"There," said The Lamb, as they went on, "is a real man, Jimmy. Eh?"

"I don't know," said Geraldi. "He's like a detective story, and I can't guess how he'll turn out until the last chapter has come along. Stir up your horse, Lam. We've a good distance to go!"

Naylor obeyed. The horses swung into a long canter, and the rocks cracked and rang beneath their striding as they wound through the lower hills, and straight on toward the valley of San Hernandez.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEWS OF THE QUARRY.

IN the bottom of an amphitheater to which the hills walked down like converging herds with threatening fronts, for it was a rocky region, lay San Hernandez itself. The railroad, which stretched a thin, often broken thread of silver across the landscape, had utilized that rock by stretching a branch line north of the town to one hill whose face had been deeply eaten away.

The two riders, from the higher land, noted these features, and in the center of their picture the bright streak of the San Hernandez River that ran down close to the town and there spread itself out in a great green march in the midst of which appeared stretches of open water, still as a mirror. Even in the distance, they could see the white reflections of clouds in those surfaces, floating deep.

It was late afternoon; a north wind cooled the air; it was more like February than late spring in that region, and the clouds swept grandly across the sky, sometimes masses of white fire as they came in line with the westerly sun, and again like purest heaps of snow fluff.

"Now where?" asked Naylor.

"Straight toward the town," said Geraldi, and led the way down the slope.

They reached the neighborhood of the town not long before sunset, and passed several buckboards jogging out the road toward the country, always with the tail of the wagon heaped with sacks and brown parcels of provisions. Then, out of the brush, scrambled a boy of twelve carrying three small birds by the legs, their wings fallen out, their feathers ruffed. In his other hand was the sling with which he had brought them down, a fork of wood, with two stout pieces of rubber elastic to give the motive power, and a leather cup to hold the pebbles.

"What's the score?" asked Geraldi, as he ranged alongside.

The boy looked with admiration at the stallion, and then more indifferently at the rider.

"One in four," he answered shortly.

"Good hunting," said Geraldi. "Come here and I'll give you a ride to town."

"I turn off down here at the crossroads," said the boy. "Thanks. Where you come from, stranger?"

"Up country. It's as bare of work as the palm of your hand, and we're down here to try for a job. What chance about here, son?"

The boy looked him over with a frankly doubting scrutiny from head to foot.

"You don't pack a rope," said he. "Cows your line?"

"Anything I can get to do is my line when I'm broke," answered Geraldi.

"Well, I dunno," said the boy. "Things is kind of dull around here, too!"

He added: "Except that the Parsons are falling some timber back in the hills. I guess that wouldn't be your size of job."

"Why not?"

"I don't aim to guess that you like to callus up your hands!"

"A man can't work without getting a few calluses," said Geraldi.

"But calluses don't come in handy—for cards, say?"

Geraldi merely laughed.

"I only gamble when I have to," said he. "Any good games in San Hernandez?"

"They got a coupla crooked roulette wheels. Is that your line?"

"Poker is a better hold for me," replied Geraldi. "That flat looks like rich ground to me."

"That? Sure it does, until its plowed, and then it don't raise nothin' but alkali. The Hughes crowd tried it. They went bust. That black spot, that's where their house used to be. They lost a right smart of money, dad says."

"San Hernandez doesn't sound very promising," admitted Geraldi. "Perhaps we'd better not stop there?"

"It's kind of rough," said the boy. "It's been rough ever since the railroad come in."

"Why?"

"Well, because of the tramps that always are driftin' along the rails. You can count ten bindle stiffs pretty nigh every day, and the blow-in-the-glass tramps, they're thicker still. The kind that always want a set-down meal. I follered one of them, one day, after ma had sent him scootin'. He tapped six doors, and dog-gone me if finally he didn't get a set-down meal at Widow Small's place. I sneaked up and looked through the window from the back porch, and there I seen him stirring three lumps of sugar into his coffee, and grinnin' at Mrs. Small, and her grinnin' back at him, sort of sicky sweet, I tell you! Yeah, we gotta lot of roughs around here, now!"

"Do they make much trouble?"

"Sure. They's been two shootin' scrapes this last month. And then trouble draws trouble, dad says. He says that there's been talk about Geraldi comin' through this place, lately."

"I think I've heard of him. Who is he?"

"You scratch a little more deeper, and you'll sure remember. Geraldi, he's the killer, he's the gunman. They're all scared out of their boots about Geraldi. But they'll get him, one day. These here gun slingers, they're always got, pretty soon."

"What sort of a looking man is he?"

"Why, he's young! Rides a black hoss. Like yours, but about a hand bigger, I guess. Geraldi, he's got long black hair, I guess. And they say that his eyes fair shoot fire. He scares people nigh to death before they ever start to fight!"

The boy set his teeth and looked into the distance, for all the world as though he were inwardly resolving that he himself never would be so overwhelmed by the reputation of any man.

"I suppose that the sheriff comes along now and then and runs the tramps out of town?"

"Yeah! He runs them out of town, all right, but he can't very well run 'em out of the quarry."

"Is that a vacant quarry?"

"Sure it is. They stopped workin' it nigh onto seven month ago. It's always got a few tramps hangin' around it. They's a new crowd up there now, Bill Durer told me. A mean, hard-lookin' lot, too. One of 'em took after him, and scared him almost to death. He run all the way home. He could scarcely talk for a day, afterward!"

"Bindle stiff?" asked Geraldi.

"No. Looked like a ornery, low-

down puncher," said the boy. "I gotta turn off here. So long, mister."

"So long," said Geraldi. "Thanks."

"Thanks for what?" asked the other, turning sharply around.

"For all the news, son."

They went on, but presently Naylor said: "The kid is thinkin' of something. He's still standing back there! Still lookin' after us, Jimmy!"

"He's a shade too much on the bright side," said Geraldi. "He'll make his share of trouble in a few more years. But he had the news, didn't he? A boy of that age with a pair of eyes and a set of ears is worth more than a newspaper, any time!"

"Why, Jimmy, what did you learn from him?"

"Where the gang is now, Lam. That's what I learned."

"I heard every word, and not a sound about the Naylors!"

"You didn't listen very hard. A new lot are in the quarry. Tramps, the youngster called them, but tramps aren't usually turned out like cow-punchers. One of them took after him. Well, tramps don't usually chase boys. Don't you see, Lam?"

"I don't see nothin'," said Naylor.

"Not a thing?"

"Unless there's a crazy cow-puncher out of work and batchin' up there in the old quarry. A quarry ain't such a bad place to lay up. I been in one for a while myself."

"Have you?"

"Sure, a long time ago, when I was a kid and had finished with a job one summer and left the place and was comin' down from the ranch I got into a blizzard and drifted into a quarry. Never seen anything that looked so much like home—so much better than home!"

"Lam," said Geraldi, breaking in gently: "Up there in the old deserted quarry we're going to find something a great deal worse than home, but that's where we're going."

"I don't foller you, Jimmy."

"Yes, but you will follow me, old fellow. I know that much about you. You'll follow me into the quarry and we'll take out poor Darcy without fail, because that's where the Naylors are and that's where they're holding him!"

The Lamb regarded his companion with awe; then he shook his head.

"And chased the kid just to make the quarry mighty unpopular with the boys of the town for a few days?"

"Of course that's it. You'll go with me, Lam?"

"To the finish."

"Straight on, then," said Geraldi, "until we're close to the town, and then we'll turn. We mustn't come near the quarry until after dark!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUARRY.

WITH sunset, the wind changed, grew stronger, and stifled the colors of the evening with a heavy blanketing of clouds. Rain began before all the sky was covered, whipping rain that came in brisk volleys, fell away to a chilly misting, and then descended again with a roar. It was impossible to keep dry. The wind plucked up the skirts of the slickers and allowed the water to drench them, but still the two riders kept on their way, Geraldi first, and big Naylor plugging his horse steadily in the rear of his leader.

They climbed the slope at the left of the quarry as the lightning began. Great electric bolts flashed across half the sky, making all the forests, and all the distant hills and mountains rush inward on the eye, only to fade far away the next instant; and the brain was stunned by the constant variation. It was as though the countryside were in motion like waves, lunging far forward, and then retreating. One moment they

were plodding through a thick surface soil that balled on the feet of the horses and made them stumble, while about them was a dim, ghostly procession of trees and of shrubs. The next moment, all flared up brightly with the clearness that was not day but like the light imagined in the inferno itself. The wet rocks gleamed as though they were themselves on fire; and the wet trees glittered with a thousand jewels.

So they came, drenched, cold, but resolute, to the upper lip of the quarry, and there tethered their horses among the trees. Thunder rolled; so great was the vibration from this or some quirk of the wind, that a thick shower descended from the moisture-laden branches above them and freshly wetted them to the skin. They discarded slickers which now simply served to increase the chill and the weight under which they labored.

And, lurking at the verge of the shrubs, they waited, scanning all that was before them by the light of the flashes.

A moment later, the form of a man loomed before them. Under the lightning, he was clothed from head to foot with brilliance by the reflections from his slicker which ran with water in the rain; then, as the thunder rolled, he was lost again in the total darkness.

The sentry on his beat," said Geraldi calmly at the ear of his companion. "You have your rope, Lam?"

"Are we going to rope him, Jimmy?"

"No. He has a gun handy. If they're watching for us as closely as this, and mounting sentinels in spite of this weather, then he has a gun in his hand under that slicker, and one gunshot would be enough to alarm the boys below us. We'll have to pass him. How long will it be before he comes back along his beat?"

Two or three minutes passed, and again the form passed them, distinguishable this time without the lightning, since they knew for what to look. The rain, powdering on his hard-faced slicker, seemed in itself a sufficient light to show him to the watchers.

Then Geraldi said: "It's time, Lam. We'll have to go out to the edge of the cliff. If I knew the lay of the land, here, I might find a way to climb down, in spite of the dark, but I don't know. We'll have to get out there, and you'll have to lower away until I'm at the bottom of the drop."

"D'you mean it, Jimmy?" asked Naylor, overcome with awe. "Go down there among 'em? I'd rather be dropped into a pot of boiling water than into that crowd!"

"Well," answered Geraldi, "if there's a better way, I don't know it. Darcy's down there. Darcy has to be reached. Come along. Move fast. We have to clip seconds, now!"

They hurried out, Geraldi again leading, and Naylor lumbering at his heels like a great Newfoundland after a terrier.

Then the ground fell suddenly away before them. It seemed to big Naylor that Geraldi had disappeared into nothingness, and for a moment his heart stood in his throat.

"Down! Down!" said a sudden voice at his feet. "There's a safe ledge, here!"

Accordingly, he floundered down, and found himself crouched beside Geraldi on a small shelf of rock; above them a bush grew up, fairly sheltering them from observation of the sentry who so patiently walked his beat through this dark weather, this wind, and cold, and rain.

So, sitting side by side on their heels, they braced themselves with their hands and looked over the edge into the pit beneath them.

Two red eyes looked back at them.

Close together at one side of the quarry floor, the thin rays from fires shone up at them, and in another mo-

ment the strangely comforting smell of wood smoke was perceptible in the air.

The thought of the heat and comfort which men were enjoying in the darkness below them, under shelter, made their own cold sufferings seem the greater, and their helplessness against odds the more appalling.

"Throw a couple of knots into that line," directed Geraldi. "Then drop it over and I'll go down. D'you think it will reach to the bottom, Lam?"

"I don't know. If you can't guess, how could I? It's full forty feet, I know, and a little over. Jimmy, I never tried to argue with you before, but if you'd only think for a minute now, you'd——"

"If I start thinking," answered Geraldi. "I'll be helpless with fear in no time. Throw in the knots, old fellow, and toss it over!"

Without another word, Naylor obeyed; the rope hissed through his hard hands; and then the lightning hung a vast torch in the heavens, so that for one moment Geraldi could see what lay before him.

It was sheer drop for twenty feet, the face of the cliff actually receding somewhat, so that there would be nothing to support him except his bare hands upon the rope. However, below this a narrow ledge appeared, and what lay still farther beneath him, he could not tell.

But the floor of the quarry could be seen by the same flash, and he saw an interlinking network of narrow railroads, a few dump cars still standing about to rot in the weather, and several small lean-tos and shacks scattered around the quarry at either side, and toward the entrance. They were doubtless quarters for a watchman, for supplies, and perhaps a hut for explosives.

At any rate, from two of these fires were now glowing.

Geraldi reached for big Naylor in the dark, and gripped his hand.

"Good-by!" said he.

"I'm going with you, man!" said Naylor. "I'll never stay behind and let it be said——"

"You talk nonsense," answered Geraldi as harshly as he could. "What would I do down there, if I didn't know that you were up here manning the rope for me? What could Darcy do? Be a man, old fellow, and stay here. You have the hardest part—to squat here in the rain and freeze to death, and keep fishing with that rope for a bite in the dark, down yonder. Stand by me, Lam. I need you here more than ten of you down yonder!"

With that, he gripped the big hand of the giant, and instantly slid over the edge of the rock.

Gripping with knees and hands, he slid slowly down to the ledge. From this he strained his eyes, hoping for another lightning flash to illumine his way, but the lightning refused to come, and he had to venture over into the blind darkness.

He found rough, projecting rocks, here, so that he could fairly walk down them with his toes, keeping only his hands upon the rope.

And at last, while he was at the very end of the rope, his feet struck yielding soil and little rocks that had fallen down the face of the cliff, having weathered from the main rock.

He knew that he was on the floor of the quarry, and turning his back to the wall, he looked earnestly about him.

The fires were nearer. And so much light soaked through the many cracks of the huts that, now that the rain-mist blanket was not so thick, he could make out the total dimensions of the little houses.

He made at once for the nearest of these, and placed himself at a liberally yawning crack.

He saw a wretched group of half a dozen men, with horse blankets around their shoulders, sitting at an open fire

the smoke of which filled the room to stifling, while the rain still beat in through the hole in the roof that was supposed to do duty as a chimney, and leaked through cracks in the wall, and flooded in onto the ground where the group was sitting.

Neither Harry nor Pike Taylor was here, nor any other face of distinction in the clan. He waited until he had been able to scan every one in turn, but Darcy certainly was also not with them.

He wondered, with a little sinking of the heart, if Darcy really had been hidden in some other place under a small guard. It would have been like the snaky subtlety of Pike Naylor.

But there was still another shack to visit, and toward this he went at once.

It was far better built than the first place. The boards had been laid with weather stripping over the interstices, and this made a sound wall all around, except for a few cracks so small that the light was barely able to issue forth, but his eye could not look in to any advantage. It was not until he had traversed three sides of the house that he was able to find a peep hole.

This was a broken board, perhaps one cracked by the fall of a big stone from the quarry wall near by, but at any rate the board had been both split and caved in by the force of the blow, so that Geraldi could look in, though with some difficulty, through a pair of small apertures.

Even so, he had to move his eye from side to side in order to survey any large portion of the scene within.

What he made out, by degrees, was a far more comfortable picture than the one he had last observed. There was no open fire, but a stove which had been packed with wood and was burning so fiercely that the men inside had been able to take off their coats.

It was a very small chamber, but into it were packed fully a dozen men. The first face that Geraldi saw was the lean caricature of Pike Naylor, looking more like a savage old hawk than ever. The next face was that of Darcy.

He sat on a low bench, with his hands behind him—probably because his arms were tied together. His ankles, too, were fastened tightly by a rope. In spite of this, and the fact that he was surrounded by enemies, Darcy seemed to maintain a great deal of composed dignity.

He looked about him from time to time, meeting every eye that cared to look upon him, his manner was easy, his head high, and only his extreme pallor might have shown that he understood the seriousness of his situation. Yet some of that pallor was doubtless due to his recent sickness.

Seeing this, Geraldi felt already somewhat repaid for the amount of risk which he had taken, the efforts he was now ready to make to free this man, and he continued his scrutiny of the others.

A poker game, as was to be expected, was going on at an improvised table, supported on the knees of the players, and therefore apt to sag unexpectedly, from time to time.

At this table, the only face he recognized was that of Harry Naylor. In a farther corner, sat the Mexican, José.

There was a little disturbance at this moment, for the wind blew up with such sudden violence that it burst the door partly open and allowed such a gust to enter that the stove fumed forth thick white smoke that burst through every crack and made the lantern light by which they were playing very dim.

The cards, too, were fluttered into disarray; and then the flame leaped into the throat of the lantern and almost went out.

There was a loud and simultaneous cursing from many throats. The voice of Harry rose after the flurry, as the door was closed by José, the flame steadied and burned bright in the throat of the chimney, and the white smoke

rose from the stove and made a cloud against the ceiling of the shack.

"Keep your eye on that door, José!" shouted Harry Naylor. "I've told you before that that's your job. I tell you again! Watch that door! Or I'll make trouble come your way."

Another voice made comment, as José expressed himself with a shrug that might have been called apology, or amusement. It was the voice of Cullen:

"If he had sense, he'd prop a stick against it from the inside. Then he could go to sleep, if he wished."

"You hear, José? Put a stick against it!"

"I never thought of that!" said José.

"He never thought of that!" sneered a chorus.

"Let him alone," said Pike Naylor suddenly.

The wind had fallen off, so that his words were startlingly distinct compared with the dimness of the preceding speakers. "Let him alone. Here the lot of you sit around like dolts—like ostriches you put your heads in the dirt and think that Geraldi can't see you. But he can!"

CHAPTER XV.

OUT OF THE PIT.

THAT exhibition of prescience, made Geraldi actually start back in his place of concealment, but he realized, in another moment, that the old man could have no knowledge of him. It was merely out of the rancor of his suspicious heart that he had spoken. Yet he had a great effect upon his listeners. Cullen actually sprang up to his feet, throwing the card table into disorder, for which he was soundly cursed by the other players. And Harry Naylor reached for the shoulder of a companion, as though about to thrust himself upward, also.

"What's the matter?" he yelled, enraged as he realized that it was a futile alarm.

"The matter is," said Pike Naylor, "that you've sat down here like poor dolts, with this gent in the middle of you. You think that you got him safe? Why, he ain't no more safer than a boy in the middle of a lot of roarin' lions."

"All right, dad," said Harry, settling back in his place, half sneering and half angered. "You tell us, will you? How could Geraldi get this here gent away from us?"

"I ain't a mind reader," said Pike. "How can I tell what a bright young gent like him would do? I'm old and my brain's pretty feeble. I been doin' the thinkin' for a flock of halfwits for so long that I can't no longer put things together very well. But suppose that he was to take a crowbar up the cliff in the back of us and start to work on one of them overhangin' rocks? He could send down ten tons that would smash us tolerable flat, I reckon!"

The danger, as he named it, seemed so real that a groan broke out from several of the listeners.

"That," broke in Harry Naylor, "would be a fool's way of getting a man away from us. He'd simply be killing his friend along with the rest of us!"

"Is Darcy his friend?" asked Pike. "He ain't his friend! Geraldi ain't had nothin' to do with him, before Darcy brought out the news of our money and stuff in the safe. Darcy ain't the sort that Geraldi would cotton to, and you all ought to know it."

He paused and made a large, inclusive gesture, as though he took in all who were present and judged them to the bone.

"No, Geraldi ain't a man that's easily pleased. The sort of a man that he would take up with if he had a good chance would be a man like me!"

He made this astonishing statement with a great deal of pride, nodding his old head over it in reassurance of himself, so that Geraldi smiled a little, on

the outside of the house, and then nodded in agreement with the other. Such a man as Pike Naylor, young or old, would have been a power which, united to his own, could have unlocked the treasure houses of the world!

"You mean," said Harry Naylor, "that he'd smash the whole lot of us for the sake of smearin' us out of his way, even if Darcy went under along with us?"

"Ain't it logical?" asked Pike, his terrible old eyes glittering at his son. "Ain't it better to kill twenty enemies than to save one friend? Besides, maybe some would live, and Darcy amongst them!"

He delivered himself of this frightful philosophy with utter complacency, but now Cullen spoke up with the terseness of one who understands his subject thoroughly and cannot be in doubt of what he says.

He declared: "I know Geraldi. I've known him for a long time and I've hated him for a long time. I think all of you know that I'm as keen for his death as any one of you, and keener, too, because he'll never leave off trailing me, now, until he's caught me, since I double crossed him in this last business between us."

He referred to his own treachery with such an indifferent air that Geraldi was amazed to hear him. It somewhat raised Cullen in his estimation to learn of the frankness with which the man could speak of his own shortcomings.

"Now," said Cullen, "though, as I say, I know all about the bad parts in Geraldi, I think that I know the good parts, also, and one of 'em is that he never will desert a friend in trouble."

"Look here," said Harry Naylor, "it's one thing to hear a lot of talk about a man that stands by his friends, but it's another thing to hear how a gent is gunna get such a fellow as Darcy away from us. No matter what Geraldi may want to do, what can he do?"

"I've told you one way," said Pike Naylor. "You can laugh at it, but it's a way. And he has other ways. He's young. He don't fear nothin' on earth! He'll find some way out, or else I'll be mighty disappointed in him!"

"I could tell you a story," put in Cullen, "about Jimmy Geraldi. But it would take a long time, and I'll only brief it in. It's about a friend of Geraldi who went up in the hills with the Afghans and got away with enough to ransom a king and a whole family of princes. The Afghans caught him and took him back. They wanted to make such a fine example of him that they didn't kill him at once. They waited a while, turning over various ways, and not finding any way that seemed to them bad enough.

"While they were waiting, Geraldi slipped up there and took the prisoner away under the eyes of a thousand men! A thousand Afghans! For my part, I'd rather tackle a thousand wild cats! I don't mean to say he did it in open day, or that they saw him do it. As a matter of fact, he managed it so that he had a good eight-hour start of them, and they never caught Geraldi."

"He got the gent away?" asked Harry Naylor, fascinated.

"Not all the distance. He died in the snows. Couldn't stand the route that Geraldi had mapped for them through the mountains. But the first part of the job was the important one for us to consider."

"What would you have us do?" asked Pike Naylor, whose eyes had burned with pleasure and excitement as he listened.

"I'd have us stop this game and face the wall around Darcy, and put two guards outside the shack to walk around it. That's my first idea."

"And a mighty good one!" said Pike. "Let's do it!"

"Hold on," broke in Harry. "We've got a fat pot here. We'll play this hand

out and then maybe do what Cullen says. Set down, all of you. He ain't here this minute, anyway!"

"That's what the gent said before the bullet hit him and the tree fell on him!" said Pike Naylor. "But go on with your ways. There ain't nothin' that should be done that shouldn't be done at once!"

However, the players settled down to their game again, and Geraldi, hearing the betting and the drawing begin, went to the door and tried it gently with his hand.

The wind was blowing in great gusts that screamed over the quarry, and sometimes descended into it with big booming notes. It was a fierce gale which had sprung up. The intermissions between the blasts grew shorter and shorter; the wind started to be one continual pressure, more than the pressure of hands.

It blew, moreover, directly against the cabin, and Geraldi, remembering the smallness of the stick which the Mexican had propped against the door to hold it in place, now stooped low and waited for a heavy blast.

When it came, with a whoop like a wild animal, Geraldi gave the weight of his shoulder to the door, and felt the stick crunch beneath his effort and the hand of the wind.

Wide open flew the door, knocked the flame of the lantern up the chimney's throat and sent it flickering out, raised the cards from the table with a great rattling, and scattered the greenbacks which were piled before the gamblers.

On the wings of the darkness, Geraldi entered.

He had charted in his mind the position of every man, but those positions instantly were altered.

He heard a confusion of oaths, of shouts, of interjections, of orders. Harry Naylor was bawling at the top of his voice:

"José! José! Shut that door! Dang you, I'll certainly make you smart for this, you——"

The order ended in wild curses, half drowned by the yell of the wind and by other voices——

"Where's the lantern?"

"Gimme a match!"

"Stand here and make a shelter, will you, somebody? I got matches, but the wind——"

"Get off my foot!"

"Mind Darcy, somebody!"

But Geraldi already was behind the prisoner, and feeling down his arms, reached the ropes which tied them. A touch of his knife made the hands free. Another touch, leaning forward and guiding the knife with his free hand, liberated the legs of the man, and Geraldi put his hands beneath the shoulders of his companion, and lifted him to his feet.

"Hey!" yelled a voice close by. "Darcy! He's stood up! He's moved! Darcy——"

In the darkness some one flung himself bodily at Geraldi, flung his weight blindly into the dark. Strong arms clasped the youth and he raised the handle of his knife and brought down the butt of it on the head which was jammed against his ribs.

The arms relaxed, but the yell of the alarmist was taken up by others.

"Darcy's moved! What's happened?"

Then a shout of fury and despair: "Geraldi! Geraldi's in here with us! Block the door, will you, somebody? Lights! Lights!"

But Geraldi already was at the door, and dragging his companion out into the open force of the storm.

The numbed legs of Darcy seemed to regain their strength almost at once, and he struggled forward around the corner of the shack with his rescuer.

Behind them, they dimly saw forms issue from the mouth of the shack. Then the door apparently was closed,

and the lantern could be lighted, its flame struggling for a moment, and sending dim and then stronger waves of light through the hut.

In the meantime, Geraldi had his man at the edge of the pit.

A great flash of lightning burst at that moment like a flower of fire in the central sky; it showed them the rope end dangling before them, but it also showed them the figures of a dozen men running wildly here and there.

"Quick!" said Geraldi. "The rope, Darcy! Is there any strength in your hands?"

"There is—there's some! I gotta win, after you've done all of this."

"Tie it around your waist—the rope end. Tie it. Here, I'll do it. Now give three tugs on the rope. Naylor will haul you up, if there's strength enough even in those big arms of his, and I think there is. Climb with your feet and catch on where you can with your hands. Help poor Lam Naylor as much as you can. There you go up——"

"And you, Jimmy?"

"I'll manage. This is all planned. Work hard!"

Already, Darcy was half clambering and half drawn above the head of his rescuer, and Geraldi was left alone in the pit, without a ladder for escape!

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT MAKES HIM DO IT?

HE could not stand idle. Above his head, the rocks were sufficiently broken and rough to give him some chance of climbing, and if he fell, the fall would not be far. He reached, found a hand hold, drew himself up, gained footing likewise, and presently he was clambering slowly up.

Another long flash of the lightning glared at him, as it seemed to Geraldi, like a hostile eye. Perhaps he winced at the strength of it. At any rate, feet and his left hand lost their hold, and he dangled by one hand only over an abyss.

Looking up, he saw Darcy clambering over the edge of the cliff; and from behind he heard a wailing cry in which he thought that he recognized the voice of Harry Cullen.

"The cliff! There they go now! They're away! It's Geraldi below!"

Grown desperate, he regained his hold with a struggle, his feet found places to cling to the rock, and he swarmed ahead, hardly waiting to be sure of each hold before he trusted his weight to it.

Then he gained the ledge above, and rolled over flat on it as the lightning glared again.

It showed enough of him to his enemies to cause a dozen bullets to whine about him. He heard them pounding on the rock; and he heard the yelling of the Naylors, not like men, but like dogs on a trail.

Something cut him across the face, like the blow of a rapidly moving hand.

He was half stunned by his exertions, but presently, as his mind re-awakened, he reached out, and found the rope end, which faithful Lambert Naylor had cast down again for him.

It raised him to his feet. He clutched the rope, and giving the signal, began to draw himself up, as Naylor pulled above him. The thunder of the last lightning bolt still was pealing when the light flashed out of heaven again, and Geraldi saw the strained, eager faces of his friends just above him, and behind them the tumbled clouds of the sky, swept and confused by the wind.

Over his head, bullets whined from beneath.

Then he was at the quarry's edge. He was over it—and now he lay flat, gasping in the grass and the mud.

Big Naylor lifted him up. Half running by his own strength, half supported staggering by the power of The Lamb, he was taken toward the horses,

mounted the black stallion, and took Darcy up behind him.

"The upper sentry?" asked Geraldi.

"When the lightning came and he seen me," said Naylor, "he run off. I guess he didn't like the look of my face, grinnin' at him in the dark. He won't bother us none again!"

They gave the horses rein.

It did not matter for the deluge that fell against them and whipped their faces, drenched and re-drenched them. For they were free from danger.

Steadily they rode on through the night. Again, and yet again the lightning leaped across the sky.

Then the thunder passed, the wind fell down, the great clouds were dimly seen parting above them and rolling heavily down the edges of the sky.

And the stars shone through, dimly, then more brightly as the last of the rain mist departed.

They went on. The soft ground sucked and popped under the feet of the horses. The slope rose before them. They were rising from the lower lands to the safety of the confused hills and of the mountains beyond them.

The changed wind now breathed from the very south, filled with the heat of the desert and blowing upon them so warmly that they were not aware of the coldness of their clothing, but only of the clinging wet.

They kept on without a pause, walking the horses, undesirous of speed, but wanting only to put behind them steadily a distance that pushed the Naylors away.

"Lam," said Geraldi at last, "what will your friends and family do now?"

"I dunno," said Lambert Naylor. "The rest of 'em will most likely want to quit and throw up the sponge and go home. But Pike and Harry, they're likely to want to stay on the trail till there ain't the last of a ghost of a chance left to 'em."

"We'll let Gleason keep the horses, at least," said Geraldi. "For one thing, because he can use them, and for another because if we go back in that direction, the whole Naylor tribe is likely to be there on our heels."

"True," said Naylor.

"Another thing, Lam. What will they do when they come across Gleason again? They know by this time what he has done to help Darcy and me. Will they try to take it out of his hide?"

The giant laughed.

"What would you do, if you was an ordinary gent, Jimmy, and you come across a hombre that took care of his own, the way you've took care of me, in the first chase, and then of Darcy in this one? Why, they ain't gunna hurt Gleason. They ain't gunna bring you back on 'em. It's bad enough to be huntin' you, without startin' you huntin' them! No, Jimmy, they ain't gunna lay a hand on Gleason's head. I'll promise you that, safe enough!"

He said it with such emotion, that Geraldi sighed with relief. And when, in the gray of the dawn, as the sun promised to rise clear and bright in the sky, they came upon a sheltered gully with plenty of small shrubbery in it, Geraldi made bold to halt and rest.

Darcy fairly fell from the saddle, and was told to sit on a rock, while Geraldi built the fire and Naylor got together the food they had brought with them in their saddlebags.

So breakfast was prepared, above all the necessary coffee, which Darcy drank with one hand steadying the other.

They let the fire burn high. Its heat dried their clothes, and made it possible for them to roll in their blankets and go to sleep.

Naylor, in the meantime, proposed to mount guard, but Geraldi would not hear of it.

"I'm not sleepy," he said. "I couldn't sleep. And that's the reason that I'll walk up and down here for a while and look the countryside over."

He silenced all argument with an imperious wave of the hand and took his beat up, pacing swiftly back and forth along a sandy ridge above their camp. The black stallion, in spite of hunger and fatigue, followed him up and down in a more leisurely fashion, pausing now and then to gather a few mouthfuls of the grass.

The giant and Darcy lay side by side, their eyes instinctively turning up to watch the sentinel who marched above them.

"What d'you make of him, Lam?" asked Darcy.

"I dunno," said Naylor. "I dunno what to think. There he is, and that's all I know."

"He don't look down at us," murmured Darcy. "He's got his head turned. What's he thinkin' of? His girl, d'you think?"

"He's thinkin' that he wished he had the pair of us off of his hands," said Naylor sadly. "What right have we to be a weight on his back, now I ask you?"

"I dunno. Hardly none at all," said Darcy. "But I lie here and wonder, Lam, as the sleep comes over me, did he give a whoop about me any of the time? Was it the fun of the game, or the rules of the game that made him do what he done?"

"Nobody'll ever know," said Harry Naylor. "He makes the rules of his own game."

Another story of Geraldi will appear in a following issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

WOODMAN, TRY THESE TREES!

THE woodman—or more probably the farmer—who has the energy and foresight to plant walnut trees on his idle acres which are not suitable for annual crops, will one day be well repaid. Tree authorities say that the walnut is one of the easiest trees to be commercially profitable. It grows rapidly and within a comparatively few years it is of size to be of monetary value.

Lumbermen say that the walnut tree, like the large family, is steadily decreasing, and that an actual shortage of this valuable member of the wooden tribe is imminent. This is the more lamentable because the walnut lends itself to a great variety of uses. In a recent survey of one section of Illinois from which but a few years ago walnut trees were shipped in carload lots, it was ascertained that not a single tree of commercial size was left stanidng. Again, in Ohio, where once there were large areas where walnuts flourished, there is now no walnut timber to be seen.

It is predicted that the planter who seizes the present opportunity to remedy this unfortunate situation will have no reason to regret his tree-planting zeal. Surely there is nothing so richly rewarding, aside from its commercial value, as the sight of one's "own" tree, and when its production is considered also as a civic duty, the patriotic planter will see to it that of walnuts at least there are trees and to spare!

Shorty Balls 'Em Out

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Was Shorty Crazy?" etc.

THE strange Mexican stood in front of Sheriff Joe Cook, panting for breath. He held his dusty sombrero in one hand and with the other hand he clutched his gaudy blanket closer to his heaving chest. His eyes were wide, his lips moved—but no words came.

"Scairt to death, ain't yuh, hombre?" asked the sheriff, a bit uneasily, as he eyed the stranger speculatively. "Waal, kinda draw yuhrself together, son, an' let's hear yuhr story."

"He liked to kilt his hoss gittin' here, apparently," remarked Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay, turning from the open window. "The pore critter outside is about done up. Whar yuh come from, hombre, an' what's the idear o' punishin' a hoss like that?"

The Mexican turned a twitching face on Shorty.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, showing white teeth, "what matter one hoss when 'El Lobo' send ze message?"

"El Lobo?" cried Sheriff Cook.

"El Lobo?" echoed Shorty.

"*Si, señors,* El Lobo!" affirmed the stranger, and he shook like a shriveled cornstalk in a November field. "It was heem as send ze message. He say no spare ze hoss, but to fly."

"The message?" repeated Sheriff Cook hoarsely. "What message an' who to?"

To Señor Sheriff, heemself!" said the Mexican, getting control of himself at last. "El Lobo say he send ze bestest regards. He say he dreenk many glasses o' tequila to ze sheriff's health—so! But he say he laugh at sheriff, also. He say he dare sheriff to try to ketch when he come in Wednesday night fer ze beeg job."

Sheriff Cook's face went black at

that, but it was Shorty who spoke up softly.

"Wednesday night, eh?" remarked Shorty. "The night o' the big Spanish-American ball, eh? El Lobo come to the baile, eh?"

"I teenk not," said the Mexican, shrugging. "He say he get plenty ze dinero—the what yuh call heem money—in the beeg job. Mebbe eet ees ze bank—I dunno."

"Say, hombre," said Sheriff Cook, and he laid no gentle hand on the Mexican's shoulder, "what's all this stuff yu're sayin', an' who are yuh, anyway? Whar did yuh see El Lobo? What's the idear o' that skunk sendin' me insultin' messages?"

The Mexican shivered again. He rolled his eyes.

"Señor! I make ze beg that yuh no be mad with Pedro Quijano. Eet ees me—Pedro Quijano—an innocent victim—as brings ze bad message," whined the newcomer, cringing before the sheriff's fury. "I no kin help, señor! I come from Las Animas. I go to Denver. But El Lobo catch me as I pass through ze mountains—he rob, he say he keel—but then he get var' drunk an' send ze bad message."

Sheriff Cook sank back into his chair.

"Excuse my roughness, Quijano," he said wearily. "I was mad and excited. That danged coyote—that's all El Lobo is—has kinda got my goat, I guess. Suppose yuh could lead us to whar he is in the mountains, eh, Quijano? Could yuh do that?"

"No!" said the Mexican promptly, and there was fear in his voice. "I am a stranger in this section," he added hastily; "I no kin find way back to El Lobo. Also, El Lobo promise to keel Quijano ef he see heem again. Quijano no know what to do."

"Yuh stay right here, Quijano, an' yuh'll be pertected," said the sheriff grimly. "El Lobo ain't comin' inter this town right under my nose despite all his threats! He said Wednesday night, eh?"

"*Si, Señor* Sheriff!"

"Wednesday night is the night o' the big Spanish-American ball over to Turner Hall," said Shorty, puffing on his cigarette. "Mebbe this El Lobo figgers on attending that ball.

The sheriff laughed sarcastically.

"When yuh try to put over a fast one on me, Shorty, yuh're so crude it's sure pitiful!" said the Sheriff. "Yuh think fer a minnit that I kain't see behind that smart remark yuh jus' made, Shorty? Yuh think fer ainstant that I'm so foolish I think El Lobo might attend that ball? I know he ain't that nutty! An' I also know that yuh've set yuhr heart on goin' to that ball yuhrself, an' now that El Lobo sends word he's comin' in Wednesday night yuh want to git yuhrself assigned to that ball so yuh won't miss it, an' at the same time yuh'll be sure to miss El Lobo ef he does come inter town!"

Shorty looked grieved.

"It's a masquerade ball, boss," he protested, "a hundred El Lobo guys could attend, dressed up as dons, an' monks, an' guitar teasers, an' who would know the difference? I jus' figger——"

The sheriff swore in disgust.

"Yuh been playin' around the Mexes a whole lot lately, Shorty, pickin' up their lingo an' habits, an' I don't like it!" said the sheriff. "With all due respect to Quijano here, I'm plumb disgusted. El Lobo is comin' in Wednesday night, as he claims, he's comin' fer the dough in the bank vaults, an' I don't mean to let him get it."

Shorty raised his voice in protest.

"It would take him too long to crack the bank, boss," he declared. "He ain't comin' fer that; he might know we'd have the bank well guarded, too. He ain't comin' fer that——"

"The bank will be waal guarded—by yuhrs truly alone," said Sheriff

Cook grandly. "I'm a good enough man fer El Lobo any day or night in the week. I'll nab him single-handed. I'll show him—while yuh're trippin' the light fanatic, as the poet says—up to that Spanish-American shindig. Oh, don't look hurt now, Shorty, I know yuhr failin's. Any time thar's a dance on, Rome could burn down fer all yuh keer. Yuh go to the blamed ball an' ef El Lobo is thar give him a kiss from me. As far me, I'm guardin' that bank Wednesday night!"

Shorty started to speak, caught himself, choked, reddened, and then tossed his cigarette away.

"Waal, boss, I will go to that ball, thanks; but meantime—ef it will help yuh any—I'll keep a protectin' eye on Quijano here so that nobody will do him dirt, as El Lobo threatened."

Sheriff Cook nodded.

"Sure—do that little thing!"

And Shorty did. While the sheriff spent the rest of that day—Monday—worrying over El Lobo, Shorty managed to get very chummy with Pedro Quijano, the unwilling messenger from the outlaw. Quijano, warming up to Shorty, confided to the deputy that he thought the bandit meant to strike at the bank if he did come in Wednesday nigh as he had promised.

"It was the tequila braggin' when he said that," said Shorty.

"Mebbe so," agreed Quijano solemnly.

But Shorty knew better. El Lobo, although an outlaw, was known as a man of his word. Shorty had heard a lot about El Lobo in the past few years. El Lobo, "the wolf," had, it seemed, been a thorn in the side of many a Colorado sheriff for years. He had been particularly obnoxious to Sheriff Cook in the early days of the latter's régime. Cook had tried his level best to capture the wily Mexican bandit but had failed to do more than arouse the undying hatred of the outlaw. Then, after El Lobo had pulled a mine stick-up in San Luis County, killing two men in the robbery, things had become so hot for him that he had had to skip out for Old Mexico. He had been gone for years. But now he had suddenly popped up again, up to his old tricks in Monte Vista, San Luis, and Las Animas Counties. And so far he had again outwitted his would-be captors.

"What did El Lobo rob yuh o', Quijano?" asked Shorty.

"He take five hundred dollars I save fer to go to Denver with," said Quijano sadly. "I ride through ze lonely pass, an' *poof*—thar he ees! He have two guns. He say he keel me ef I fight back. I no fight. He taka ze money—all; he take me to his camp, whar he talk beeg, drink ze tequila, an' purty soon give me message to take to Señor Sheriff, an' hoss, an' say he keel me ef he ever see me again."

"Nice feller," commented Shorty.

"Not very," said Quijano.

"I don't think he'll come in Wednesday night at all," went on Shorty presently, "that is all a great bluff. He would never dare come in, after warning us like he has! Him an' the sheriff are out fer each other's throats too strong, an' El Lobo knows it, Quijano. I don't doubt but that he'd like to git the sheriff dead to rights, but the sheriff might git El Lobo dead to rights fust—see?"

"Si," said Quijano, nodding.

Shorty got for Quijano comfortable—and safe—lodgings on Pecos Street on Monday night. And Tuesday Shorty spent almost entirely in Quijano's company, guarding that stranger against any violence that El Lobo or any of El Lobo's henchmen—should he have any such allies—might seek to inflict on the Mexican. But nothing happened. Tuesday afternon Shorty and his ward visited Sheriff Cook in the latter's office and found the sheriff in

high spirits, oiling up a sawed-off shotgun.

"My worries are over, Shorty," said the sheriff genially. "I have figgered out a way o' gettin' my man to-morrow night. It's jus' as waal yuh ain't gonna be thar, too. After all, this is a purely personal matter between me an' El Lobo, an' may the best man win! I'm gonna win! I'm gonna set me in a cheer up on the roof o' that one-story harness shop across from the bank, with Ol' Betsy here in my hands, an' hidden by that big sign. I got a hole in it I kin peek through, an' ef El Lobo or any other outlaw comes nosin' around that bank door, Heaven help him!"

Shorty frowned while Quijano rubbed his hands together.

"Señor Sheriff plenty smart!" exclaimed Quijano.

"Ef yuh want me to help yuh, boss, I'm ready," said Shorty worriedly. "I don't think El Lobo is goin' to walk inter yuhr trap. He ain't that dumb, seems to me. Ef he comes in at all tomorrow night——"

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders in disgust.

"Oh, he'll go to the ball, o' course!" he said sarcastically.

Wednesday was uneventful, too, as far as any excitement went. The sheriff sat tight-lipped in his office, grimly awaiting the coming of night and El Lobo. He had ordered Shorty and Quijano to make no mention of the impending visit of the notorious outlaw, for, he declared earnestly, he meant to deal with El Lobo single-handed. The old sheriff was quite confident that his scheme of taking El Lobo would work out nicely. He meant to shoot first and ask questions afterward, for El Lobo deserved no consideration—murderer, robber, and all-around gunman, he was hardly worth the bullet to cut him down.

Shorty and Quijano, however, managed to keep busy most of the day. Shorty was arranging for his masquerade costume. He had decided to go to the great Spanish-American ball dressed as Don Juan, and he was particular about his costume, too. Gertz, the tailor, who imported vast quanities of costumes every year just for the annual masquerade ball, spent a warm hour getting Shorty properly fitted. Shorty, it appeared, wanted every little thing just right, even down to a shiny knife that he was to wear at the belt.

"Yuh carry yuhr gun, holster, an' belt?" asked the worn-out Gertz.

"Naw—I ain't a deputy to-night, I'm a Spanish Don Wan!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Gertz, in relief. "Waal, it is easier to fit the costume ef yuh weah no artillery beneath it, an' o' course yuh couldn't wear it over the clothes—it wouldn't look nice."

"O' course not!" said Shorty.

Finally, when Shorty was satisfied, and had his bundle of clothes safely wrapped in a neat package, Gertz fitted Quijano with a cowboy outfit. Shorty had decided that Quijano must attend the ball, for Quijano's own safety. "Ef I got to play guardian angel fer yuh to-night yuh gotta be right under my wing," Shorty had declared, "fer I'm gonna go to that ball with about the purtiest gal yuh ever seen in yuhr life, Quijano. An' yuh gotta come along ef I'm to protect yuh, foller me?" And Quijano had agreed. When Quijano's costume had been wrapped up, the pair returned to the sheriff's office, where they found Sheriff Joe Cook oiling his sawed-off shotgun again.

"Ef yuh want me to-night——" began Shorty.

"Nope, I'll handle this matter personal," said the sheriff curtly. "I see yuh got yuhr dancin' outfit! Waal, all I gotta say is this, Shorty—yuh're actually turnin' inter a Mex—with due apologies to Quijano here. Yuh're spent more time in the Mexican quarter

in the las' month than yuh have in this office."

"But, boss, I was learnin' things!"

"Scat!" said the sheriff, waving Shorty out. "Go to yuhr blamed shindig an' be done with it. Give all the black-eyed señoritas a big evenin', but on yuhr way home after the doin's ef yuh're interested enough to drap in here or at the morgue, yuh might see what El Lobo looks like at close range. I'll surely have him one o' the two places!"

"Sure enough?"

"Yep, sure enough."

Shorty and Quijano withdrew, leaving the sheriff to his hopes. Shorty took Quijano to an address on Quivas Street, where he introduced the stranger to Conchita Aca, the belle of the Mexican quarter, whom, Shorty explained, he was to take to the dance that evening. After some few minutes Quijano began to feel that "two was company and three was a crowd," apparently, and he excused himself, saying he could find his way back to his rooming house safely. Shorty let him go, and once Quijano was on his way Shorty began to "talk turkey" to Conchita.

"Kid," said Shorty, "I got bad news fer yuh. I ain't goin' to take yuh to no ball this evenin'—reason bein' I got to take yuhr brother, Perfecto, to that doins'."

"Perfecto?" questioned the girl, in surprise.

"Yeh—Perfecto," explained Shorty. "Is he home?"

"He's in the house now!"

"Good! We'll go in an' talk things over!"

The conference was brief enough. Shorty did very little explaining, but in the end he convinced the disappointed Conchita that he could not take her to the dance and, in addition, he managed to borrow the very clothes she had intended wearing herself to the ball. Then, after Conchita had gone to prepare supper, Shorty and Perfecto slipped into their masquerade costumes—the youth into the Don Juan outfit that Shorty had obtained for himself, and Shorty into the flimsy, fancy laces and shawls that Conchita had lent him. Two hours later Perfecto and Shorty appeared, so garbed, at the great Spanish-American ball. The big Turner Hall was crowded. Shorty, peering through the black mask that covered his face, and using a fan for further concealment, looked in vain for Pedro Quijano.

"That bird ain't here," said Shorty, "unless he's changed his plumage, too. He might have switched costumes at the last minnit."

"He may have found trouble," whispered the youth Perfecto, who had heard all about Quijano and El Lobo from Shorty. But Shorty shook his head. "I been sizin' up Quijano in the days I've had him under my protectin' wing," said Shorty, "an' he ain't half as dumb as he looks. He's a smart hombre, that guy—mebbe too smart fer his own good. Now lissen to me, Perfecto——"

"Si?"

"We ain't dancin' to-night; I'd give myself away sure ef I was to waltz out thar in this rig, bein' I ain't so danged graceful. We're settin' out over in the corner thar, near the door, with me rubbin' a foot now an' then fer a alibi as to why I ain't dancin'. Gosh knows my feet do hurt, crowded inter these slippers! We got to do just one thing—stick together—an' yuh ain't to be surprised no matter what happens. Yuh git me, Perfecto?"

"Surely!"

"Knowed I could rely on yuh an' Conchita, Perfecto," said Shorty complacently, and he was reaching for a cigarette when he remembered he was playing a female rôle. He caught himself in time.

"Nuthin' to do now, Perfecto, but wait!" muttered Shorty.

It was a lively crowd as well as a large one that thronged Turner Hall that evening. All the prominent Mexican residents for miles around were there—the Lopez family from Aguilar, the Silva clan from Silverton, the Garcias from Alamosa, the Arandas from Gunsight. In addition, a great many Americans were present, too. Jewels sparkled on the fingers and arms of the fair señoritas; diamond and pearls glittered at the throats of many. This annual Spanish-American ball was the social event of the San Luis Valley, and attracted the best society of the district. Shorty, sitting quietly in one corner, beside Perfecto, wished that he might be out there on the shiny floor, whirling some beautiful señorita around to the orchestra music.

"It is too bad Conchita cannot be here!" said Perfecto.

"This might not be no place fer her," murmured Shorty, fidgeting again, absent-mindedly, for a cigarette and catching himself in time. "I dunno, Perfecto, but I got a feelin' things is goin' to happen——"

The words were hardly out of Shorty's mouth when a shout from the sleek-haired Mexican at the door sounded above the orchestra music. The next instant the doorkeeper obediently raised his hands ceilingward and backed into the room. The music ceased. The dancers halted and stared curiously. The next second, however, explained matters. A swaggering, black-mustached fellow, with a huge sombrero cocked rakishly over his left eye, and a big gun in each hand, stepped jauntily into the hall.

"Hands high—every one!" he yelled loudly.

"El Lobo!" came the cry from a score of throats.

"Yes—it's me—El Lobo!" cried the gunman, advancing farther into the room; and as he did so, Shorty and Perfecto, standing, like the others, with their hands above their heads, saw that the outlaw had a lariat attached to his belt, and at the other end of the rope, some ten feet behind the desperado, was a gagged and securely bound captive. Shorty started at sight of the man.

"The sheriff!" he whispered to Perfecto, who nodded.

"I sent word I was comin' in here to-night, but seems the bozo that got it kinda kept it to hisself!" yelled El Lobo. "But mebbe it was jus' as well. The news might have scared off some o' yuh hombres. I've come fer what gems yuh got among yuh, an' yuhr dinero. Everybody shell out inter the hat that my friend passes among yuh!"

At that a figure stepped from among the dancers. It was Quijano. Shorty recognized him immediately, despite his mask. Shorty let one hand drop swiftly to Perfecto's side, but the eagle-eyed El Lobo saw the move and swung his gun that way at once.

"Hey, señorita, lift them hands!" he ordered.

"That feller," cried Quijano, pointing at Perfecto, "he is the sheriff's deputy. El Lobo—a sharp eye on heem!"

El Lobo laughed at that revelation.

"Come, Chico, little one, step forward!" cried El Lobo, aiming both guns at Perfecto. "I want yuh out here whar I kin watch yuh. Quijano, go ahead with the collection—we must hurry off. We have to drop this buzzard I got on the rope over a cliff afore we are through for the night—hurry! Yuh, Mister Deputy, stand still!"

El Lobo's eyes rested for a second on Perfecto.

And in that second Shorty acted. There was a quick flick of his right wrist, a flash of bright steel through the air, and a hoarse cry from El Lobo, who staggered back, dropping his guns. At the cry, Quijano, busy plucking

jewels from his lined-up victims, swung and raised a pistol, but he hesitated as he saw a girl leap forward. The next second the girl was on him—a marvelously strong girl—and had wrested his gun from his hand. In a moment all was turmoil in Turner Hall, but before the startled, frightened, gasping El Lobo could raise himself on one elbow and fix terror-stricken eyes on the knife hilt that stuck in his breast, Shorty was over him, gun in hand.

"Ah, señorita, the tigress!" muttered El Lobo, his nerve and braggadocio gone completely. "Shoot—to end the misery!"

"Is thar a doctor here?" cried Shorty, and at the masculine voice the bandit caught his breath. The next second, as a doctor bent over El Lobo, Shorty flung his mask and shawl away. Quijano, in the capable grasp of Perfecto and another Mexican youth, swore in a frenzy of surprise and chagrin. The next minute volunteers carried the limp form of El Lobo, who had fainted, out of the hall. The doctor had ordered him to the hospital. Other volunteers escorted the protesting Quijano from the hall; but it was Shorty himself, in the queer garb of a belle of the ball, who cut the ropes that bound Sheriff Cook, and removed the gag from his aching mouth.

"Shorty, yuh ol' sinner!" grunted the sheriff, rubbing his neck where El Lobo's lariat had fitted a bit too snugly to be comfortable. "I guess yuh kinda interfered in this mess to-night jus' in time to save the county o' Monte Vista one ol' sheriff. That pizen-ivy El Lobo sure caught me nappin'! How he ever knowed I was up thar behind that sign on the roof o' the shack opposite the bank, I dunno; but he snuk up behind me an' roped me nice afore I could even think what was occurrin', after which he trussed me up, explainin' he was goin' to humiliate me proper in public, after which he was goin' to drap me off a cliff up Bear Canyon—an' he would 'a' done it, too!"

Shorty nodded as the hushed merrymakers crowded closer.

" 'Course he would 'a' done it, boss," agreed Shorty, "but thar ain't no mystery in how he knowed yuh was behind that signboard at all, to my way o' thinkin'. This strange rat, Quijano, that I been protecting fer the las' several days ain't nuthin' but a stool pigeon an' aide to El Lobo—he demonstrated that to-night! It was him told El Lobo that I was there, without a gat, an' that yuh was settin' up on that roof guardin the bank. Yuh're lucky El Lobo didn't blow yuh to bits instead o' lassoin' yuh like he did, boss!"

Sheriff Cook smiled sadly:

"He was too egotistical to do that, Shorty; he wanted to humiliate me—make a fool outta me an' a hero outta hisself fust."

"Sure," said Shorty, grinning, "that's whar he fell down on the whole deal, sheriff. That's what I kinda figgered from the start. Yuh see, I never believed this here Quijano at all about him bein' made prisoner an' sent in by El Lobo with that threat to yuh. I decided that Quijano might be a scout fer the outlaw, an' I acted accordin'. I also decided that ef El Lobo was comin' Wednesday night it was to hold up the ball an' not to break inter no bank, fer that would be too much o' a job fer him. I let Quijano see the outfit he thought I was goin' to wear, an' I let him see Conchita, who he thought I was takin' to the dance; then I switched inter gal's clothes, brung Conchita's brother along to act as me, an' when the time came snatched the knife from his belt an' tossed it properly."

The sheriff stuck out a hand to his deputy.

"Put her thar, Shorty!" he invited. "An' I apologize fer makin' them recent remarks about yuh spendin' too

much time in the Mexican quarter. Ef yuh learned that knife trick thar, it was worth all the time yuh used. I'm sorry I was so hasty in talkin'."

"Yuhr apology is accepted, o' course, boss," said Shorty, "but as fer that knife trick—waal, I learned that by mail. That's what I used that Five Dollars yuh gave me at Christmas fer—fer a correspondence course in stiletto jugglin', sword swallerin', an' knife throwin'."

"Waal," said the sheriff, "even so—it was worth it!"

A COMMUNITY FIRE DEPARTMENT

POSSIBLY as a reward for the foresight of the citizens, the town of Logansville, Wisconsin, which four years ago started a volunteer fire department, has never had a fire within the confines of the village, though it has been called to aid in extinguishing thirty fires in the surrounding area.

The farmers who live within a radius of five miles of the village organized the volunteer fire company, and at the outset of their fire-fighting career they made incursions into all the surrounding area, fighting fires in Blackhawk, Ableman, Lone Rock, and Lime Ridge. Three years ago when the village of Richland Center, thirty miles away, seemed doomed for lack of water, when five other fire departments were helpless, Logansville saved the town with its hose lines which were sufficiently long to reach the Pine River. Possibly inspired by the success of their neighbor, other towns in the area have now organized their own departments, and the Logansville fire warriors are only summoned in unusual cases to go outside their own bailiwick.

It is said that the speed with which the Logansville fire department gets on the job is remarkable. The telephone operator receives alarms and sounds an electric gong. Within a minute or two, enough members have appeared to operate the truck, the latecomers proceeding to the fire in their own cars.

MENACE FROM ABOVE

THE person interested in wild life cannot help but note the measures that are frequently taken to aid the reindeer in his struggle for existence. Nor can one ignore the necessity for this assistance from man, when one considers the large number of wild beasts that prey or would like to prey upon the reindeer. It is, for instance, a matter of common knowledge that the wolf, the bear, and the wolverene exact their toll.

And to this time-worn list of predatory creatures can be added the eagle which, in Sweden at least, is now working havoc with reindeer herds. This amazing fact was recently brought to light in a report of the Lapp warden in the northern province of Jemtland. He states that several times during recent months he has seen full-grown reindeer killed by the great birds. And, upon one occasion, he was privileged to witness a battle between a giant bull and one of the eagles. The reindeer managed to escape, though he was hard put to it. And this is evidently a common occurrence, as Lapps in other regions report danger to their herds from the eagles.

In view of the bird's depredatory methods, it is particularly fortunate that the Swedish eagle is protected by law during the entire year. Regrettable as it is, therefore, that the reindeer should be so molested, it is something to know that almost every country is in league to help it ward off its enemies.

CHINOOK

By John Frederick

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JOE HARNEY, a tenderfoot, joins grim Andrew Steen on the boat trip on the Yukon. Chinook, Steen's splendid husky, follows Harney, to Steen's annoyance. Later, beautiful Kate Winslow, whom they meet on the trail, is helped by Harney, though Steen protests and warns him against her. Combating innumerable dangers, all directed apparently against Kate, they finally reach Circle City. Kate leaves them here, but Harney follows her to the headquarters of one Sam Crockett.

Crockett and his sister, Sylvia, Winslow's second wife, are Kate's enemies, knowing she has seen through their schemes for destroying her father. He, wrongfully suspecting Kate, has turned from her and wishes never to see her again. The girl, with Harney, Steen, and Chinook endeavor to escape from Crockett's gang. On the snowy trail Kate collapses, at the end of her strength.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SUCCOR IN SIGHT.

WHEN he picked her up, Harney had one rather staggering revelation.

He had thought, as he watched her gliding over the snow, climbing, drifting through the landscape, that she was a veritable sylph, an airy creature, a slender child. As a matter of fact, he was lifting a good, solid hundred and forty pounds at this moment, beside the wrappings of the heavy clothes.

Strong men can carry such a weight, but not forever.

Certainly he could not carry her in his arms, and yet he kept her there as long as he could endure the burden in this manner. For it seemed to the somewhat childish brain of Harney that as he bore her on through the snow in this manner she had become his, surrounded by his arms, surrounded by the joy that grew up in him. Sometimes he staggered, and then he laughed, drunkenly, and went straight on with a stronger step.

He could look down at her and see without being seen, for her head fell helplessly back upon his shoulder, and the arm about his neck was limp. So great was her exhaustion that she

moaned as she breathed; many a man would have given up the struggle long before this, but she had gone on, when steps were separate and complete agonies.

It was strange to see her with her eyes closed, the intellectual strength, the criticism, the mockery, the satire melted from her face and only her weakness remaining, only the woman.

But a hundred and forty pounds!

Tenderness could not lighten the load for long! He saw big Steen come striding back of him.

He came with a dark face more clouded by fury.

"You to sneak in—to take advantage!" said Steen in a fierce murmur. "Give her to me!"

But she recovered her senses, as it were, at that moment, and slipped to the ground.

"I can go on for a while longer," she said. "If you'll help me a little!"

She took an arm of each of them and they went forward, the girl swaying between them. But now and again she raised her head and looked up. It was always at Steen that she gazed, it was always for Steen that she smiled.

Harney watched, incredulous, his heart seemed to be turning to lead in his breast.

But then he told himself that he could understand clearly enough. For what was he, after all, to pretend to the notice of such a girl as this, clever, graceful, beautiful enough to take the eye of any man?

Steen was the one for her, if either of the two, Steen who had no equal, Steen the Hercules, the warrior!

And if he, Harney, would have taken equal battle with Steen without fear, as he accepted it at their first meeting on the ship, still he felt that there was a great margin of difference between them, with the advantage of intelligence, experience, dignity all on the side of his companion.

So it was that the girl turned to him in the end. He could understand why she did so, but it did not decrease his bitterness. He looked back and to either side. They were traveling surrounded by their enemies. It was simply vain folly, he felt, to keep on; except that to pause and wait for death was intolerable. And he was almost glad that this day would see the end of them all!

The sky had grown almost clear, the only clouds appearing high up, a very thin translucent veil. Straight ahead of them was a gathering mist upon the horizon, a bluish mist that coiled thicker and thicker, throwing up spectral arms, to which the heavens put down other arms as in greeting, so that the mist grew continually.

The pursuit now grew suddenly excited. Those to the rear increased their speed, and on either side the dog teams were turnd in at an angle, so as to cut off the retreat of the three.

Steen brought them to a halt.

"Here's the end," said he.

"There's no end for you, Andrew and Joe!" said she. "Go on to either side. They won't follow you as long as they can have me for the asking. Go on to either side! Why should we all go down together? If you get away—you may be able to help me, afterward—from the outside, when——"

Steen raised his hand.

"Talk sense!" said he. "We're due to stay here. Joe, unlimber your gun. If they come close enough for a Colt to reach them, we may pepper a few of 'em before this day's ended!"

He laughed a little, the fierceness rising in his voice and in his face.

Spotted on three sides of them, the groups of the enemy were equidistant points on a circle. They converged only slowly, now, and as they came, a gunshot clanged from the rear, followed by a rattle of several weapons.

"They're gunna take no risks," said Steen, bracing himself to a sudden gust

of wind that smote them with staggering force. "Harney, you take the ground!"

They went down, all three, burrowing into the snow, while Chinook, after a leap into the air and a howl, imitated that good example, and burrowed into the snow at the side of Harney.

At this, the gun fire broke out all around them. They presented only hummocks of snow, indefinite forms, but the plunging rain of the rifle balls knocked through the snow as through a mist and whipped all about them.

They were advancing, too, which gave them a better chance with every step, except that the light was now falling. The reason was obvious.

That horizon mist had advanced with a wonderful speed until it was rolling, now, from the center of the sky to the earth, still blue with darkness, still putting up arms. But these arms which on the horizon had appeared like indistinct mists were now huge masses of impenetrable cloud. Half the sky was obscured, and now the wind, which had blown before in gusts, leaped on them with a wild scream.

There appeared beneath the solemn and rolling blue of the storm cloud a mist of shining white. It was the dazzling load of snow sucked up from the earth by the force of the wind and whirled on high. It came nearer; the sky was rapidly turning dark; and now the rifle fire was a steady roll, and they could hear men shouting orders, directions, cursing.

They well could curse.

Once Harney and once Steen rose on hands and knees from the snow and took pot shots at the nearest enemies. Whether they struck the target or not, it was a sufficient warning to keep the others back; the popping of the rifles became like the distant clapping of hands, overwhelmed by the howling of the wind.

Then, like the falling of a great wall, with rumblings, roars, and buffets, the wind reached them.

Bewildering white lashed across their faces; thunder cannonaded over them; and then lightning cracked the sky across.

A hand gripped the shoulder of Harney in the murk of that dirty twilight It was Steen, his face close, his lips parted. Not a word could Harney hear, making out only a murmur, but he could see the pointing hand, and he rose.

Together they drew up the girl. One on each side of her, they supported her in the darkness, in the merciless smitings of the wind; and so they staggered onward, reeling together from side to side, like a trio of drunkards uselessly striving to give one another help.

Something arose before them, blurred, stumbling. It sank back into the snow, and there was a snake tongue of flame from the muzzle of a gun.

They paid no heed, as though the force of that wind were great enough to turn back bullets!

In fact, there was hardly freedom for them to think, in the roar and the yell of the wind. And the man who had dropped into the snow and fired at them, shot no more, as though he, too, realized that he could work no harm with his weapons!

Rapidly the storm changed. It began to cuff them from behind. It began to lighten their feet. They went with staggering lurches and uncertain starts. Sometimes, when the wind failed a little, they were lurching backward. Sometimes a flaw of it struck them still from in front. But they made good distance with the gale behind them.

And for long miles they continued in this manner until the girl suddenly sank to her knees.

There was nothing more in her to respond to the urging of her will, and together the two men carried her on.

More fiercely than ever the wind screamed behind them, pressing on them

with hands of lead, as it were, then making them light as figures of straw.

Then, as suddenly as it had rolled upon them, the storm rolled away, leaving the sky not gray-filmed, but sparkling bright with the light of the long summer.

They looked back, hopefully, but also with dread, and they saw their dread fulfilled, for across the snow came two sleds, as the passing of the storm unveiled them, making in their own direction, and gaining every step!

"It's the end," said Steen. "We've had two busts of luck, but we won't have a third one. We'll put her down here and make the last stand, Harney!"

Harney, however, had followed the retreating gloom of the storm, and now he pointed ahead with a hoarse shout. For as the mist cleared in front of them, a long, low building appeared, with smoke curling from the top of it.

Steen glanced in the same direction, and then whooped joyfully.

"A way house!" he shouted. "Whoever has the luck, here, has a ton of it. A way house! Step out, old son. We've still got more than half a chance!"

It gave their aching and stiffening bodies fresh strength. Their blood seemed to stir again, their muscles grew supple, and carrying their burden between them they hurried on.

Behind, they could see the dogs trotting, whipping the sleds over the newly wind-scoured surface of the compacted snow. So clear was the air that they even could see the whips curling in the hands of the drivers.

But all that speed and all that united effort was too late.

The way house drew closer. It seemed to the tired eyes of Harney to change its place and float nearer, helping out their tired legs. The smoke that floated above it was a flag of peace, as it were, and he found himself laughing weakly with relief.

So they reached the door.

It opened on a long, low room, with rows of bunks all around it and a deacon seat beneath them. He saw one window, an open ventilator to keep the air fresh, a dirt floor, a dirt roof, the logs of the walls made proof with moss. There was a stove burning red-hot at the top. Two or three groups of people were already inside. And suddenly it seemed to Harney as though civilization were worth while, after all, comforting, warm, a succor for the weary and the distressed.

He slumped against the wall, weakly, barely with force enough in his arm to shut the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLACK SHADOWS.

THERE were two such way houses between Circle City and the mines, used by travelers, particularly by freighters, going to and fro with their dog teams. The long bare houses furnished shelter, wood, and beds, nothing else, for travelers were expected to carry their own food with them, and to do their own cooking.

Those who already were in the place, cooking, or eating, received the newcomers with wonderful placidity. They looked over the three, and then one of them rose, as though he silently had been delegated by the rest of the tired, hungry men to do the courtesies of the place to these exhausted late arrivals.

It was a grim-looking sour dough who approached Steen, as the latter laid the girl on a bed of bare poles. In the autumn, when it was possible to get hay, the beds were deeply and comfortably covered with it, but as the year wore on, the hay was constantly taken to stuff into moccasins, with the result that by this time there was not a straw upon the beds.

"The kid's kind of tuckered out, eh?" said the sour dough, glancing at Kate's limp form.

He proffered a cup of hot tea which he had brought over.

"This'll do him good," said he. "Windy weather for travelin', and the young kids like this one oughta have sense enough to stay at home——"

He had leaned a little as he spoke, and suddenly the wan face of the girl turned toward him, delicate, inescapably feminine. The sour dough turned upon Steen a glance of mingled contempt and envy.

"Give her this," he said, handing over the tea. "How are you fixed for grub, the three of you?"

"Blank," said Steen.

"Blank?" growled the other. "Countin' on the way houses?"

"My poke ain't empty," answered Steen. "Besides, this is no pleasure trip!"

This amount of explanation seemed to be sufficient for the sour dough, who now went off to the stove and prepared another meal with expedition. Harney, making for a bunk, lounged into it with his back resting against the wall, his arms hanging, his hands dangling.

He watched with a dim eye where Steen was working over the girl, bathing her face and rubbing her hands until she was sufficiently revived to drink the tea. And now she was smiling up at Steen, with returned color. She was flirting with him, Harney could have sworn, with the abandon of a bird on a sunny branch.

She would have no care for the man who had carried her and tugged her so great a portion of the way; it would be only Steen who mattered—he who had had the strength for the last effort! So thought Harney, and bitter was his soul within him.

Yes, even now she raised her head and smiled toward him vaguely, dimly, as though he were a picture on a wall, barely recognizable!

His strength came back to him slowly. Another might have been totally prostrated by the effort he had made, but perfect condition told. Gradually, his heart beat with a more assured stroke, and his breathing was deeper. Finally he was able to sit up, and last, there was the food!

Appetite had come raging back upon him and the steam that went up from the kid that the sour dough brought him looked to Harney like incense for the gods.

The door was kicked open, then, and the squat, enormous form of Mike Logan appeared in the opening.

He stood there for a moment, regardless of the howls of protest about cold air that roared at him from the men about the stove.

Then he strode in slowly, taking step by step as he surveyed the people in the way house. Not a doubt for an instant remained in the mind of Harney that this was one of Crockett's men. If he had doubted at first, the doubt would have been removed when he marked the manner in which big Mike Logan strolled down the hall until he noted Steen and the girl.

Then he paused, stared at them, and whirling about, his eyes encountered those of Harney. He crossed to him with a smile of cruel satisfaction, and stood there looking down at the shaking hands with which Harney held the kid of food.

"You poor sucker!" said Logan. "You poor stiff! You're done for, kid, and I'll have the eatin' of you!"

Harney did not even look up. He only looked at the great feet of the newcomer and said nothing, for he felt the truth of Logan's words. The strength had run out of him. It had leaked from the tips of his fingers, and from the soles of his feet. There was nothing left to him except the shape of his body.

Logan lingered for another instant.

"You've had all the luck to-day," he said grimly. "To-morrow, we clean you up. They ain't gunna be a scrap left of

the three of you. But you, kid, you're my meat. Remember that. Think about that, will you?"

He went off, and Harney breathed a little easier as the fellow departed. There was no doubt but that he would do as he had been bidden and think of the warning and the warner!

When he looked up from an empty kid, he saw Mayberry pulling off his gloves and stamping his feet beside the stove.

Mayberry, also! Could he be one of the men of Crockett?

He was reassured when, a moment later, the eye of Mayberry fell upon him, and the older man came straight to him and shook his hand.

"Hello!" said he. "I didn't know that you'd started on so soon!"

"I didn't know that you were coming up so quick," answered Harney.

"I decided to get up here and give things an overlooking," said Mayberry. "There ain't any way to run your mine except to do it yourself. A straw boss is only a man of straw, most of the time, and so I came up here to put a little stiffening into the boy that's handling my claims. What made you start? Are you anxious to get to work on the creek?"

He was a very good-natured fellow, continually smiling and nodding as he talked, and Harney listened to him with quiet pleasure.

"Maybe I'll get a chance to work for you soon, Mayberry," said he. "But the fact is that just now I'm tied up with another job."

"What job, son?"

"Why, a personal freightin' job, as you might say."

"Freightin'?" cried the other in surprise. "I ddin't know that you had a team!"

"I have, though."

"With Chinook to lead, eh?"

"That's right, and two to foller."

"Only a three-dog team?"

"That's it, Chinook, and this foot, and that foot!"

Mayberry, understanding, laughed in a deep, husky bass that seemed too deep and too large for his body.

"I won't ask questions!" he said. "You understand your own affairs. Sounds mysterious enough to have something to do with a woman, though!"

He went back toward the stove and Harney sat up with a revived strength. The food, the friendly, good-natured words of Mayberry, now made him almost his old self, and he was able to go over to Steen and the girl.

Steen had made himself wonderfully useful. Above all, he had arranged a warm bed for Kate by getting from several of the other drivers in the way house, bits of tarpaulin, and old sled robes.

There were even a few bits left over, with which Steen and Harney could attempt to make themselves comfortable.

Kate could not look at any one but Steen, now. It seemed to Harney that, no matter how close he came to her, or how often he spoke, her glance always wandered toward the other big man, and dwelt on the dark, Egyptian face.

What emotion Steen felt, on account of this steady and deep devotion, Harney could not tell. The man's face was like stained granite; it never altered. But once, when Steen thought he was unobserved, it appeared to Harney that the eye of his companion softened, grew gently luminous as it dwelt on Kate Winslow.

It was enough for Harney.

It was like seeing a wolf wag its tail.

It was like hearing a wolf bark!

Suddenly Harney knew that Steen was in love with this girl as profoundly as he himself could be. And if she were not in love with Steen in return, then all signs failed, and the language of gestures, attitude, looks, had no meaning!

He spoke a few words to them both. The girl answered him in monosyllables;

Steen answered him not at all, except at last with a dark, impatient look, and so Harney went to bed.

He had to accept another favor from Mayberry before he was asleep. The latter vacated a bunk near the stove, and invited Harney to take it.

"I got a sleepin' bag," said he, "that keeps me roastin' even in the snow, so what do I need to be so close to the fire for? You take this place, kid. It'll make you sleep good, and you ain't got much to put around you!"

Harney did not argue. Fatigue was spreading like poison through his body. It knocked at his brain like a hand at a door, and when at last he had lain down on the bare poles of the bed, with a meager wrapping of fur rags and tarpaulin about him, and the glow of the stove in his face, he had only to open the door to that knocking, and instantly he was unconscious, fallen like one from a height into deeps of sleep, and deeper and deeper into the same dark water.

So he lay for long hours, the hands of that profound slumber rubbing the agony from his overlabored muscles, and restoring his brain. He slept no longer with a frown and with set jaw and puckered mouth, but relaxed, happy.

Now he had a dream that he was passing over a meadow toward a garden gate through which he could see the warm flames of many flowers, of yellows, and golden, scarlet, crimson, rose; of purples, of violets, all mingling together like a brilliant smoke. He came straight up to the gate, but when he strove to look in more closely, a shadow appeared, blocking the gateway—a shadow like that which a man casts on the wall, when he stands before an open fire. He could dodge this way, and lean that, but the shadow still cut off his sight of the lovely garden.

Vague unease and distress rose in the heart of Harvey, and suddenly he opened his eyes and saw above him the pools of shadow across the ceiling, felt the warmth of the stove oddly blocked away from him, and then was aware of something gleaming just beside him, rising into the air.

It was a knife, gripped in a man's hand, and behind and above the hand there was the face of his companion, his benefactor, his generous helper of Circle City and now again at the way house.

It was Mayberry!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GOOD FRIEND MAYBERRY.

THE shock of that sight rendered Harney instantly awake. It gave him a chance to see again, and more vividly, the contorted resolution in the face of the man beside him, the beastliness of murder writhing on the features of the sour dough.

He saw the knife come to its height; he saw the left hand of Mayberry stretched out toward his breast, as though to guide the down stroke to a correct target; he saw the raised right arm stretch as Mayberry rose on tiptoe for the stroke.

Then Harney moved.

It did not take much of an effort. It was merely a quick stroke with his right arm that staggered Mayberry backward with a faint grunt of terror and surprise.

He did not fight back. The wakening of the giant was enough for Mayberry, and he turned to flee just as the long arm of Harney shot out and the great hand picked him off the floor by the nape of the neck.

He was crushed to the floor upon his knees, his eyes popping with fear, his mouth agape as he gasped for fresh air.

Slowly Harney relaxed his throttling thumbs. He even ventured a glance around him, and made sure that this swift segment of a tragedy avoided had not wakened a single one of the sleepers.

Most of the men lay snoring, their

bodies flaccid with weariness and slumber. Once in a while, there was a childish murmur of complaint, and he knew that that was the voice of Kate, speaking confusedly in her sleep.

But no one roused. No one groaned, or stirred, half awake.

He said to his captive: "Mayberry, they ain't a soul that knows. They're sleepin'! If they wake up, they're gunna find you settin' here peaceable and quiet on my bunk, talkin'. They'll not need to know what you've said. Y'understand?"

But Mayberry, staring before him like one stunned, said nothing for a time.

At last he muttered:

"I deserve everything that's coming to me! I got it all coming to me, Harney!"

Said the latter: "Back there in the saloon, Mayberry—they'd got to you already and told you to do everything that you could for me?"

"You mean the money for the dog?" asked Mayberry.

"Aye, and the drink before that!"

"D'you think that I'm as low as that?" asked Mayberry slowly. "Well, maybe I am! I dunno! I dunno! Look what I would've done this same night!"

He pressed both hands over his face and drew them slowly down. He seemed rather weary than in any agony of remorse. Except for the uneasy quivering of his hands, Harney would not have known that his captive was desperate.

"The drink money—the money for the dog," said Mayberry, "of course all that was my idea. And that was what started the brain of—of him, working!"

"You mean who?"

"That I won't say."

"I figger that you will."

"You be danged, then," said Mayberry. "I won't say a word!"

Force would be easy to use, but instead, Harney used appeal.

He said gently: "Parner, you played white with me. I owe Chinook to you. I'm not gunna try to force talk out of you, but—a minute ago I was a quarter of a second from bein' a dead man. Now I'm settin' here and askin' you why? What did I do to you, man?"

"You to me? Nothin', nothin'!"

"I must've done, somehow. It ain't likely that you'd be after me unless I'd harmed you, some ways. How did I step on your toes, old man?"

"You never done nothin'," Mayberry assured him. "It was in the cards that I was to cotton to you right off, and like you fine. And it was in the cards that I was to show my liking and do a couple of pretty good turns for you. Well, that was the cause of all the trouble, you can see!"

"No, man, I don't see."

There was a rift in the side of the old stove, through which a single red ray glided out and fell upon the face of poor Mayberry as he talked, turning his head rapidly from side to side, and sometimes shuddering throughout his body in the excess of his shame and of his grief.

"Why, when Crockett or his spies seen what happened, they figgered that I was the man to use on you. I'd have your confidence! So they used me, of course, right pronto."

"How could they make you, Mayberry? You're not the kind that's easy bought. They couldn't get together your price."

"Couldn't they?" asked Mayberry, with a soundless, sardonic laughter. "I'll tell you, man! We all got our price, only it ain't always in hard cash. They's some of us that have a price in bein' flattered and smoothed down; and they's some that get their head turned by givin' 'em a chance to kick the other boys in the face; pay some men notice and you never gotta raise their wages. Get a young girl to smile at an old man; get an old man to praise a young one. They's hundreds of prices, son. And

one of them is the price of being respectable. I been respectable for thirty year, now. But I wasn't always! I wasn't always!"

He made a brief upward gesture, as though resigning himself, as though casting upward in smoke the evil of his youth which now had overtaken him.

"Crockett knew about it. He knows about everything, I guess. So when he come down on me, I figgered that I had to do what he said. It was you or me. I figgered that I couldn't give up what I'd done. I'd won through. I'd got to a landing place. I was out of the dark. There was enough stuff stacked up on my claims to keep me easy the rest of my life in God's country. I told Crockett. I begged him to take a split on what I had and not ask me nothing, but he wouldn't listen. More'n money, he wants you dead!"

Harney listened, absorbed, with pity rising in him.

"And Steen?" he asked. "Steen was to go next?"

"Steen?" said Mayberry. "I dunno about that."

"I should've thought that Steen would've been got first," persisted Harney. "It beats me. I don't understand at all. Why was it me that Crockett wanted you to get first? Didn't he say Steen?"

"Steen?" said the other impatiently. "Why should he worry about Steen, once he's got you out of the way?"

"But Steen—why, everybody knows what Steen can do!" said Harney, more amazed than ever.

Mayberry looked sourly at him.

"I dunno nothin' about it," said he, "and I wish to heaven I knew less. All I can say is what I heard from Crockett—that you'd give him more trouble than any ten men in his life. It was you that throttled a mad dog that was about to tear her, you that made tracks to keep her from a gang of his boys that was about to pick her up, you that trailed the sled that was carryin' her off, afterward, and fought three men for her. It was you that stopped the pair that was stealin' the boat, and her in it; and what you've done since then, I know myself, and wouldn't 've believed that any man could manage it, except that I watched with my own eyes! If you wanta know why he wants you first, them are some of the reasons, I guess. As for Steen, he's big enough, and he's hard enough. But the hoss with the most heart is the one that gets my money to carry!"

"The hoss that has the heart—as though Steen didn't have heart to burn!" murmured Harney.

"I'm telling you what Crockett said to me. Why should Crockett be wrong? He never is wrong, man!"

Mayberry grew silent, his glance fixed apparently upon the stove, but really upon the distant future, as Harney easily could guess. It was well enough to call off all accounts, now that the other was so genial and gentle, so oppressed by the sense of his sin. Yet Harney could not forget the convulsed face that had appeared above him.

He said at length: "Mayberry!"

"Aye!" said the other, dreamily.

"I'm not gunna ask you a question. I'm gunna tell you."

"All right."

"You've killed a man long before tonight!"

Mayberry did not stir, made no answer.

"That's what Crockett had on you. You've killed a man, and I'll lay my money—that you did it with a knife!"

At this the other started, with a faint groan.

"You can say what you want," said he. "The cards are in your hands. But finish with me quick—or let me go to bed. I can't stand to talk to you, man. I can't stand the sound of your voice, even!"

He turned his head away as he spoke.

But it was not hard for Harney to guess why. The sight and the sound of Harney reminded the other that he had planned to take the life of this man! And he turned with a shudder of self-disgust from the picture of what he might have done.

"Very well," said Harney at last. "I've never been quite so near before. But we'll let it go. So long, Mayberry. I'd like to say that it's all right. Anyway, it's right enough for me to let you go."

The other rose without a word of thanks, without speech of any kind, and crossing the room, dropped onto a bunk and lay stretched there, face down, with his arms hanging over the side of the poles, like one utterly exhausted—and such Harney could guess him to be! The very soul of poor Mayberry must have been weary for the strain of the past few hours. Aye, from the very moment when Crockett had assigned this brutal task to him!

But Harney stretched himself, and watched the light of that undying day of the arctic summer pouring steadily in through the window.

He stood up, and scanned the sleepers. Then he went to the place where Steen slept and touchd his shoulder.

"Kate!" whispered the sleeper.

Then he wakened and sat up, thrusting himself high on his great arm. At Harney he scowled fiercely.

"What's up?"

"You've slept long enough," said Harney. "We gotta start!"

"She'll never make a day's march unless she's rested up."

"She can ride on the sled."

"What sled?"

"Why, son," said Harney, "I got a good friend here, by the name of Mayberry, and the way that things stand between us, I reckon he wouldn't refuse anything that we ask him. He'll let us take the same team and sled that he used in getting here!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE WHIP HAND.

THE sound of the pick spatted sharply out of the pit, almost like a clapping of small hands, and Sam Crockett paused at the edge of the woods with his sister.

"I hoped that we'd find him in the hole," he said. "And there he is! Where's that gun?"

"Here," said Sylvia. "But be easy! He has a pair of ears, I tell you."

"They'll be plugged with more than cotton, in a few seconds," said Crockett.

"The other way's better," she insisted. "A lot better!"

"You're talking nonsense," he told her. "Besides, the stuff's not right. It didn't work on Harney."

"He's an ox, not a man," said Sylvia. "I thought that he'd never go down. He fought like a fury against it! But my dear husband is nearly fifty, and he wouldn't last."

"Fond of him, all right, aren't you?" sneered the brother.

"Don't dislike him," she replied calmly, "but I'm sick of him."

"Which adds up to about the same thing," said Crockett. "Here I go——"

The sound of the pick ceased, and as Crockett stepped out, the head and burly shoulders of Winslow appeared above the edge of the prospect hole. For, not content with his valuable claims already established, Winslow had come here apart to dig in the seclusion of the stunted forest. He had found nothing as yet, but his patience was not easily exhausted.

Now, at the end of his shift of labor, he climbed from the prospect hole and made for the tent which stood close beside it. Crockett, at the first glimpse of him, had faded back among the trees. There he stood, frozen in place behind a trunk, while his sister remained equally turned to stone, one hand stopped mid-gesture.

Within the flap of the tent the big shoulders of Winslow disappeared, then Crockett whispered to his sister: "A pretty close call, Sylvia, eh?"

"It means that the luck is with us, to-day," said she.

"Unless Harney comes through in time," said he.

"Harney? He's used up. He was staggering like a drunk when he went into the way house. He'll never be able to get through, with a dozen men watching him. Never in the world, even if old Mayberry doesn't slip a knife into him!"

"That was a pretty idea of yours," said her brother, retrospectively. "But we have our job ahead of us now. Harney, that dolt of a Harney—that great square-headed hulk! The deuce's own luck has been in him. If Harney were out of the way, I'd go after Winslow roughhanded!"

"Go after him anyway," said Sylvia. "He's nothing to me. And as for Harney, his luck's used up. Wait a minute, Sam. I'm going into the tent first to talk to the old boy. I'll pave the way for you. You're a repentant man that wants a new start in life. And if you won't get it through him, who will help you? You hear, Sam? While we're talking mealy-mouth, like that, you ought to have a safe chance to polish him off. That's the only way you'll be able to get at close range, and I don't trust a revolver at long range."

"Soft and tender and clinging, you are!" said he. "But right, for this time. Go on in!"

She was almost to the tent when Winslow appeared with a skillet in his hand. He dropped it into the snow in his surprise at seeing her.

"Sylvia, Sylvia," he exclaimed, "what under heaven brought you back here?"

"The big house was so frightfully lonely," said she. "You'd never guess how cold and still and wretched it is without you, dear!"

"Humph!" said Winslow, a man not easily stirred by his emotions. "You've been there many a time without me before this. There's something else you want, Sylvia. Let's hear it!"

He stooped and kissed her forehead as he spoke. Plainly his mind was on the business of cookery at that moment, and the whole interest of his soul was in the prospect hole which he was digging. This abrupt and casual questioning made Sylvia flinch. But she answered with an apparent frankness.

"You're always right! It was partly the house—but it was mostly Sam."

"Sam?" he said blankly.

"Yes," she replied.

"Who do you mean?"

"The man you told me never to speak of again. My brother, Sam Crockett!"

He picked up the skillet, turned it thoughtfully, then looked back into her face.

"I'm sorry," said he, and his manner of saying it would have been enough to stop any other person than Sylvia Crockett.

She, however, persisted.

"He's been abused by every one. The world's against him, dear. But that's no reason why a big-minded man like you should be. Sam, come speak for yourself!"

Crockett glided out from among the trees and stood before the other.

There was no difference in their size, except for the breadth of Winslow's shoulders, but the latter was imposing as a lion; and Crockett was like a smooth-stepping panther, easy, flexible, swift.

He bowed slightly to Winslow, as he came before him.

"I never should have done this," he said. "Never should have let Sylvia persuade me to do it. But the fact is that I've been desperate, Mr. Winslow!"

"You've been broke, do you mean?" asked the miner.

"Not broke," said Crockett, with a

smile so open that his face lost its shadow and became almost charmingly frank. "Or broke in a sense, if you wish. Spiritually broke, sir."

Winslow nodded: "Go on!" he said briefly.

"The fact is," said Crockett, "that I've been a bad man. A very bad man!"

"I know it," answered Winslow with equal gravity.

"Do you?" answered Crockett, a little disturbed because this confession did not alter the situation a trifle, at least.

"I know nearly all about you," answered Winslow.

A gust of wind picked up a thin glitter of snow and hung it in the air about them.

And behind them, the trees bowed, swayed, and groaned and clashed with the force of the squall. Only Winslow appeared unmoved, for both the Crocketts, as they heard the noise, started, and looked behind them.

"A thousand bad reports about me, I know," said Crockett, looking on the ground. "But I think there's some good in me, too. Mr. Winslow, you're a man who could give me a fresh start. I don't care where I go. And you have interests in China—you have friends everywhere. If you sent me with a new name and your backing, I'd be able to start a new life."

Winslow looked him straight in the face.

"Bunk, my man," he pronounced.

"Mr. Winslow," said Crockett, lowering his voice suddenly with appeal, "I want to ask you how you can have this attitude toward me—when my sister is your wife?"

"What has that to do with it?" asked Winslow bluntly.

Sylvia Crockett, with an imperceptible nod to her brother, slipped to one side, uncoiling the long lash of the dog whip which she carried. Presently she was behind her husband.

"It has this to do with it," said Crockett. "If there's the same blood in us, how can she be all good and how can I be all bad?"

"Crockett," said Winslow, "I married a second time because I was a very lonely man. I'm fond of your sister. Perhaps she's told you that I've never pretended any boyish devotion or love. We live amicably together, but sometimes I feel that our happiness is founded on sand. Shall I tell you why? Because of you! I know your character and I know your career. Everything comes handy to young Crockett. Green goods, salted mines, wallets that are fitted a little too loosely into pockets, diamonds that shine a little too brightly on a woman's hand, old-fashioned safes that a can-opener can crack, even new ones that need nitroglycerine and yellow soap to blow them, smuggling of Chinamen over the border, smuggling of drugs, also. And when I've named these things, I've only skipped lightly over the smaller sins!"

There was a light cracking sound in the woods behind him, and Crockett jerked his head over his shoulder, but then decided that it was the wind, only, and the giving of some bough as another brushed it.

The gust died down. The arctic silence fell softly over them.

"Are there bigger things against me?" asked Crockett in a sad voice.

"Slightly larger."

"Such as what?"

"The betrayal of old friends, Crockett. That's one thing."

"You're very hard on me," murmured Crockett.

"I have to be hard now that I have you before my face. And the thought of you has been a constant poison in my life since I married your sister. All these things are against you, Crockett, and worse things besides!"

"Mr. Winslow, you make me out a monster!"

"Crockett, I fear you are! A monster,

and a murderer, as well. I almost think that I can see it in your eyes now, as I tell you the truth about yourself!"

"In my eyes?" said Crockett.

"Why do you look on the ground, man, if there's any honesty at all in you?"

"Well," said Crockett at last. "I can look you in the eye as well as any man, for that matter."

And he raised his head suddenly and stared full in the face of Winslow.

"By heaven," said the latter, "there is murder in the heart of you, or else I'm a blind man!"

He drew back a little as he spoke, and that movement was the signal for which his wife had been waiting. Over him she flung the long, tough lash of the dog whip, and jerking the noose tight so that it bound his arms to his sides, she twisted the two ends together.

He was helpless before them; and in the hand of Crockett dangled a Colt, gleaming blue and bright.

Winslow did not struggle. The instant grip of the lash upon his arms convinced him that resistance was useless. He closed his eyes and muttered: "Sylvia, too! Oh, heaven, that I have blinded myself to what I have almost guessed a thousand times!"

CHAPTER XLI.

"WELL DONE!"

THAT speech appeared to give the keenest pleasure to the great Crockett.

"You hear that, Sylvia, old girl?" said he. "He's suspected that being my sister you were the same breed of danger?"

"I hear!" she said, her voice brusque, harsh. "But finish it up. Make an end of it, will you, Sam?"

"She wants speed," said Sam Crockett, his dark eyes brooding over the miner. "The dear girl has nerves, you see, and it disturbs her a little to see you go under. But it don't disturb me. Not a bit!"

Winslow considered the speaker gravely.

In the first struggle he had grown flushed, then pale, but now his ordinary color had returned; he was gravely calm, observant.

"Crockett," he said, "I know what you want now—to wring words out of me, just as the Indians used to love to wring yells out of a victim. But that's not the stuff I'm made of. I agree with my dear wife. You might as well finish your work at once. You'll get no exclamations out of me!"

"Won't I?" said Crockett. "But that's a challenge, old fellow, and challenges appeal to my heart and soul, I tell you! To do the impossible! There was the president of the First National at Claitonville. He said it would be impossible to wreck his safe. Impossible! That was the word that stung me. 'Fame is the spur, et cetera.' Therefore, the bank lost its money and the president lost his life. Disturbed vanity caused him to commit suicide. Now with you, Winslow, you're sure that nothing can cause you to exclaim—and yet perhaps a mere word or two about your daughter——"

"Sam, will you stop it?" exclaimed his sister.

"I have no daughter," said Winslow. "Therefore, it makes no difference to me what you say!

"However——" began Sam Crockett, when Sylvia interrupted again:

"Sam, this very minute Harney may be slipping up on us!"

The thought alarmed him enough to make him leap back and whirl around, but he saw only the tall, dark face of the forest and snow dust mounting up.

"Harney is beaten for once," said Crockett.

"If we must talk, who is Harney? Some honest policeman?" asked Winslow.

"Harney," said Sam Crockett, "is the most extraordinary man I ever have met. I have been beaten, I have been baffled before—sometimes by luck, sometimes by men, but never more than once by any one man, no matter how often luck assisted him. Harney is different. Harney, I should say, is the ordinary bulldog, the common man, the genius lacking brains, such as the streets are filled with, such as covers the range. Nothing but courage and a strong body were given him. And yet Harney has beaten me, baffled me, traveled a thousand miles in spite of every odd I could bring against him, endangered all my plans, and finally rushed me so much that I have been forced to adopt this crude, this stupid method of disposing of you in order to rake in your present or surface profits."

"An interesting young man, but if he's a fool, how can he have done so much?" asked Winslow.

"This Harney," said Crockett with considerate thought, "who has nearly maddened me, crushed me, prevented your 'natural' death by slow poison which would have made dear Sylvia the 'natural' heir—instead of becoming Mrs. Murderess Winslow at a stroke—this fellow Harney who has done so much in spite of his small equipment of brains, is a man inspired by a woman. Think of that, Winslow! Inspired by a woman!"

"By the love of a woman, I suppose you mean?" said Winslow.

"Exactly! By the love of a woman. Of what woman, you may ask?"

"I do not ask," said Winslow.

"You must, however," said Crockett, "because the woman in question is that same daughter whom you have disowned, rubbed out of your will, erased from your life!"

Winslow raised his head as a bull raises its head in front of the herd.

"Yes," said Crockett. "Cleverly playing him as an angler plays a fish, she has permitted him to tow her upstream, as it were, over the rapids, through every danger, twitching her through my very own fingers——"

He extended his hand and closed the fingers slowly, venom in his face.

"And all for the sake of your dear girl, Winslow. Doesn't that change your heart toward her?"

"Crockett," said the captive, "I told you that your words would leave me totally calm and cold. They do."

"Ah, and do they?" said the criminal.

"They do. Death is not particularly bitter to me, either, because there was never a man who stood more alone in the world than I do now!"

"Not even curious as to why she came all this distance?"

"Not a whit."

"Not curious to know what supported her through all her march, nerved her through terrible dangers, enabled her to bring two men into her service—two giants among men—and let her float like a bubble past enough dangers to have wrecked another Napoleon?"

"Not curious," said Winslow soberly. "She was inspired by the same guilty cunning that makes a beast of prey persevere on the track of a dying moose."

"Winslow," said Crockett, "like most honest men, your prejudices are contemptible and your ignorance a vast well of darkness! Do you still think that your daughter dropped the poison into your morning orange juice?"

Winslow stared and said nothing.

"Because she was straight-eyed, intelligent, clever with her tongue, ready with an answer, never cornered, elusive, independent, full of wiles—because she was these things, you were ready to suspect her. You never in your life were at ease with her. Not after the first time you found her eye on you, and a faint smile on her lips!"

He paused, as Winslow colored.

"No," said Crockett, "that girl was worthy to have made a wife for me.

For the sake of such a prize, I might actually have become honest, except that honest neighbors are such dull ones! However, Winslow, she didn't please you. She wasn't the moon-faced, calf-eyed, clinging-vine type. She wasn't the helpless, hopeless, brainless variety that softens the hearts—and the minds—of common men like yourself. In a word, she was an unsatisfactory daughter! And in the end, it was perfectly easy for you to accept against her the testimony of a stranger in your house despite a score of years of experience with your own daughter! Bah!"

Winslow, at this, drew a short, deep breath, but he set his teeth over the words which were about to break out.

"However," said Crockett, "lest you should die with any misconceptions, let me tell you that it was not my sister, it was I, who slipped through the door from the backstairs and dropped the little addition into the glass of orange juice."

The breast of Winslow heaved.

"You follow me, my clever fellow?" said Crockett. "And, therefore, you may follow me still further when I suggest that to intelligent fingers there is such a thing as interrupted letters, and forged ones to take the place of the real——"

"Ah, heaven!" said Winslow, his strength suddenly breaking, his head falling. "She was honest and true, and I have been the blindfolded dolt in my own house!"

"Exactly," said Crockett cheerfully, his eye seeming to collect strength and pleasure from the dejection of the miner, "and that which supports this girl across the Arctics is one of the oldest emotions in the world, one of the simplest, the purest—filial love, old fellow! In spite of your letters—bludgeonings with words—in spite of her pride—she had no grievance against you, Winslow. She didn't go mad, either, knowing her own innocence, and the lies you were believing. She simply came three thousand miles to try a last time to talk to you in person! But she comes too late. Not too late, however, to have given life a trifling new taste on your palate, Winslow, I take it?"

"Yes, it's true," said Winslow. "I would pay down my life blood drop by drop to see her for one moment, and beg her to forgive me. I would kneel at her feet. If heaven sees me, I am kneeling now!"

As he said this, he raised his head above the venomous and sneering face of Crockett, and above the sight of the forest, and up to the pale, bright sky of the North, and reverence and sorrow for the moment so met in his expression that his face assumed a grandeur of patience and of grief.

Crockett brought him promptly back to earth.

"It's a man's duty," he said, "to teach the weak-wits and the fools. But I think that I've taught you your lesson, Winslow. Are you ready for the period to be put to our little talk?"

"I'm ready," said Winslow, looking back into the face of Crockett.

He looked beyond him, however, in the next instant, and his expression altered in a singular manner.

The gun in the hand of Crockett had not yet risen when a great voice rang hoarsely out from behind the trees: "Crockett! Crockett! Throw up your hands and drop that gun! There's two of us have you covered!"

It was now that the greatness of Crockett appeared.

He neither changed color nor winced at the shock of those words which meant that his schemes were snuffed out—his life, perhaps, with them.

He looked upon Winslow with a slight smile as he said: "You see that I'm right, Winslow? A rare girl, and a pair of rare men that she's brought along with her—a good sled dog and a good leader, we might say, eh?"

"Crockett, dang you!" boomed the voice of Steen, who had spoken before. "Will you drop your gun?"

"Presently," said Crockett, and as he spoke, leaped sidewise, spun, and started angling for the trees at wonderful speed, the gun speaking from his hand as he raced.

His sister, darting back across the clearing, disappeared in the opposite growth of shrubbery, but such luck was not for Crockett himself.

It was Steen who brought him down; it was Steen who finished him with a second shot as he rolled himself vigorously toward the sheltering shadows of the woods.

When they reached him, they found him almost gone. He only lasted long enough to open his eyes and recognize his destroyers with a quiet smile. Then, in spite of the fact that Steen's well-aimed bullets had cut him down, he raised his hand with a wave toward Harney.

"Well done, my boy!" said Crockett, and as his hand fell, he died.

CHAPTER XLII.

TO GIVE HIM LIFE.

WHAT Joe Harney felt, as he leaned against a tree and looked down into the dead face of Crockett was the weight of his own hands!

They had been tensed for the battle; his whole soul and body had been made taut for this crowning effort, and now that it was accomplished weakness and sluggishness ran through his veins like water.

There was a veil before his mind, also. It was only dimly that he saw Kate Winslow in the arms of her father. And the sound of their voices broke faintly on his ear, like the sounds which pass through the roaring of cascades, inarticulate, heard but meaningless.

He saw that she wept; but this seemed to have no meaning to him. He saw the tears running down the rugged face of Winslow himself, and this he looked upon with the uncomprehending eye of an infant.

Ever and anon, he looked with wandering eye around the scene, saying aloud, softly: "This is the place! This is the place!"

It was almost as though he had seen it before. But the journey of Kate was ended here, and Crockett was dead. His shadow was removed, which had lain with such sinister darkness over the paths of all of them! And this was the end of the labor.

It seemed to Harney that the separate fatigues of the long way now descended upon him with united force—the toiling over the pass, the races through the snow, the furious shooting of the rapids! All of these perils ached once more, numbly, in his brain, and all of these fatigues were lead in his body.

Idly he watched the wind rippling the hair of the dead man; idly he watched the living smile which goes with death, and looked down to his own hands, heavy, feeble, useless.

An electric presence came beside him. It was big Steen, and he turned and looked Steen in the face.

Was he seeing him for the first time? Or was it true that Steen had grown thin, his eyes deep-set, his mouth cruelly taut? So it appeared to Harney at this moment.

He smiled in a vague, childish way at Steen.

"I guess it's finished, Steen," he said.

Then he fumbled in his mind: "You did some pretty shooting, old-timer!"

"If I hadn't shot him, you'd 've been able to run him down," said Steen. "That was what mattered. Finishing him one way or the other. He was a dead man, the minute that you laid eyes on him here. Me, I didn't count! It was you that he thought of when he kicked out. You know it, too!"

"I know it?" echoed Harney, amazed.

"You know it perfectly well."

"I know it?" The face of Harney grew hot and the blood leaped through his body. "What are you drivin' at, Steen?"

Chinook slid up and looked with cold green eyes upon Steen, as though he realized that danger was coming out of this man.

"Her, too," said Steen. "She counted on you all the time."

"You mean Kate?"

"That's who I mean."

"She ain't looked at me for two days!"

"You dolt!" said Steen with disdain. "I was thinkin' that what I was about to do was a sort of a shame, but I can see now that it's necessary. I gotta remove you. There ain't any place for a blockhead in this little old world of ours. Harney, you come with me!"

"Where to?"

"To the finish of our trail!"

"I dunno what you mean by finish, Steen."

"Don't you? I mean, to the finish of one of us, and let the other go on and get her if he can!"

"Her?" said Harney. "Kate?"

"Her!" said Steen.

"You mean that you want her, Steen?"

"Ain't I been mad about her from the first minute that I seen her?" said Steen.

"Why, man, you swore that she was no good and that she'd make nothin' but trouble!"

"She's made it, ain't she? Joe, when first you come over the sky line, I figgered that I'd found a new kind of a man, I was aimin' to make you my partner, permanent, but I knew when she come along that she'd be the bustin' up of everything!"

"Hold on, Steen. You mean that she knocked you over, and you ragin' agin' her all the time?"

"What else do I mean? Of course I mean it! Who could've looked at her once without seein' the truth? She was made for the paralyzin' of the brains of men! She was made for it. I seen it at the first look, and it turned me sick."

"Meanin' because it would bust our friendship up, Steen?"

He said it with wonder, because he never could recall the time when Steen had appeared or acted as a friend; there had always been a cloud on his face.

"Bust up our chance of friendship," corrected Steen. "Me that had gone alone in the world, it meant something to meet a man-sized man. But I seen that I couldn't want her without you wantin' her. I seen that a bust was comin'. I was kind of glad when they snaked her away from her tent. It rubbed out the problem."

"Would you've let her go, then?" said Harney.

"I would! She's the kind to make a good memory, not a good wife. She has too many brains! But you went out and got her back, and that started the crash. There was no help, then. There had to be trouble. She had to pick between the two of us."

"They's a lot of other men in the world outside of us," said Harney.

"They's only one man now," said Steen.

"Meanin' you?"

"Meanin' you!"

"I tell you, she ain't looked at me!"

"Because she wanted me to string along and work hearty. That was why she turned the cold shoulder on you. But now you're gunna be blotted out."

"By you, Steen?"

"Aye, by me. I licked you once. But I wouldn't take advantage afterward. You'd saved me out of the sea!"

"Luck beat me, that day."

"You still got a heart?"

"To break you in two," said Harney fiercely. "If it's trouble you want, Steen, you see me. You're crazy!" he went on. "She's played me along like a

fish on a line. You can't see that, because you don't know her. And I do!"

"Do you, son?"

"I do."

"There's plenty places here in the woods where we could finish this out."

"Wherever you please."

"Foller me, then!"

Steen turned his back and stalked off among the trees. He covered several hundred yards before they came out into a narrow opening in the woods, where the ground was level, free from snow, and only littered by a few fallen branches, most of them half rotted and torn down by the last storm.

Around this open space, Steen looked carefully.

"Are you ready?" said he.

"Ready," said Harney, peeling off his heavy coat.

Steen imitated him; they faced one another.

"Look at Chinook! You want him to help?" asked Steen with a sneer.

"Go back!" Harney commanded.

The big dog had been dragging himself closer on his belly. Now he flattened himself against the ground and wagged his tail.

"Away with you!"

Chinook whined, appeal in his eyes.

"He's smellin' the fight," said Steen. "He's got as good a nose for trouble as any buzzard. He always had!"

"Get!" cried Harney, and at last Chinook rose and retreated to the verge of the trees, where he lurked behind a tree trunk, shaking himself as though he had just dragged himself clear of the water.

"You got him, too!" said Steen slowly. "There's been two things that I've wanted. Chinook. I got him, but he never was mine, and you come to sneak him away from me. Kate—and you follered her around like a slave, till she got used to you!"

His voice turned to iron.

"What'll it be, Harney? Pick your way of fightin'!"

"Guns," said Harney, "are welcome. But they make a noise. And we want peace here, eh?"

"Yeah. We want peace," assented Steen.

"Knives is silent," said Harney. "But —how much time you spent in Mexico?"

"Never been there."

"Then," said Harney, "I wouldn't be takin' advantage of you. I been there I've learned the ways of knives."

"All right," said Steen. "And what's left, then?"

Harney held out his big hands.

"These, Steen."

Steen started, a fierce light of joy coming into his eyes.

"Joe," said he, "remember that I met you once, and beat you!"

"Luck beat me that day," said Harney. "I'll take you with these, and ask nothin' better."

"It's a finish," said Steen.

"It's a finish."

"Till one of us hollers enough."

"Till one of us hollers enough!" echoed Harney, his lip curling in disdain at the thought.

"Or—till he's dead?"

"Yeah. Till he's dead."

"Then heaven help you, Harney. I hope you won't be too proud to holler!"

"Watch yourself," said Harney.

"It ain't fists alone, this day. Remember that. It's anything you can do with hands!"

"Aye. Strangle holds, too!"

"Are you ready?"

"Ready," said Harney.

"You was jealous because she hadn't noticed you," explained Steen. "So you got me off here into the woods, and then you tackled me."

"That's what you'll tell her when you've stretched me out, Steen?"

"It's gunna be my sad duty, kid!"

"Then," said Harney, "here's something to give you a little life."

And he struck Steen lightly across the face with the open of his hand.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE WAY HOME.

THE big dog watched from the shadow of the trees.

All his movements were in sympathy with the battlers. Sometimes he crouched, digging his big talons into the soft ground. Sometimes he dragged himself forward on his belly a few feet. And sometimes he crouched back.

Now and again he made ready to spring.

But a moment later he was sitting erect with lolling red tongue from which saliva dripped.

So Chinook alternately shrank and approached, but eventually he was sitting still and laughing at the progress of the battle.

For the master was victor!

He could see the hard-handed Steen reeling under blows. They closed, writhed. The arms of Steen were plucked away. He was smitten full in the face and staggered, hands down.

"Are you through!" said Harney. "Are you through, or d'ye want me to finish it? Because finish it I will if ye ask for it!"

Now Steen had fought the greatest battle of his life, and he was beaten. He could see the defect through one eye; the other was blinded by the drops that drained from a wide gash over his brow. There the hard knuckles of Harney had bitten to the bone!

He had tried all his tricks. He had tried all his wrestling wiles. The ground was gouged deep where their feet had stamped and scraped. But the strength of Joe Harney had seemed to grow as the battle grew, and now he laughed as he looked at the face of Steen. All the madness of battle which is the oldest rage of man stormed and raged in his veins.

It was that laughter that gave him new power, while the gloom of Steen was like a weight upon him.

So Steen looked and knew that the laughing man had beaten him; and Harney felt the fury of destruction burn to the tips of his fingers, which yearned for the throat of Steen.

"I'm not through," said Steen. "I'll break you in two, still!"

"D'ye mean it? Are you askin' for it, Steen? Because if you are, may heaven have mercy on you, because I won't! You've snarled and snapped like a wolf. You've hated everything, includin' me, and now it's your time to go down. D'ye hear me, Steen?"

"I hear you, and dang you!" said Steen.

Harney came at him, not rapidly, but as a boxer closes on an opponent, with dancing, uneven steps, so that the enemy cannot gauge the progress of the attack with accuracy.

Even Chinook knew that the crisis had come.

He stood up, half crouching, tense, trembling. He went forward to what he felt was the limit that he might not pass, the irremovable boundary established by the spoken will of his new master. Cross it, he dared not. No matter how he yearned to add his teeth to the fight, and so swiftly end it with slashing strokes, yet all his love of Harney was less than his fear of that man.

So he waited there, taut, on the boundary.

And as Harney came in, Steen, leaning one hand against a branch of the tree behind him, felt that the last moment of his life had come. He gripped the branch hard, and under his strength felt it crack.

That was suggestion enough for his desperate mind.

He ripped it away with a sudden jerk, raised the jagged club that now armed his hand, and as Harney rushed in, he struck!

That Chinook saw, and half his length he advanced across the verge of the clearing, with a horrible snarl in his

throat. Then he saw his master reel, fall, and support himself with one hand, while the other was at his stricken head.

Chinook hesitated. All his soul urged him to break in upon the battle with his decisive aid, but man is mysterious. His ways are not to be forecast or foregathered, and he smites good actions and bad with a whip of fire!

Only, to that scene of disaster, he felt that he must bring some other human aid, and turning, away he raced. A backward glance showed to him how Harney had rerisen, staggering, and was driven unsteadily back before the attack of Steen.

Then speed blinded the wolf dog. The forest crowded past him, a legion of shadows; the open flared dazzling on his eyes, and there was the woman whom his master had touched, had talked to. His scent was still upon her, faint, but distinct to Chinook. Therefore, she was a friend, and with her human hand she might do what he dared not try.

She shrank from him with a scream, for he came on her like a raging demon from the woods—but Chinook caught hold on her skirt and drew her toward the trees.

Who has not seen a stunned and beaten boxer reeling in front of a furious and victorious enemy, but his very reeling disappoints the blows of the conqueror! So it was with Harney before Steen.

The smashing blows of Steen grazed and glanced from his head and body, twisting him this way and that.

And always down his head flowed the tide from the blow which had descended upon his skull, which had stunned and paralyzed him, body and brain.

This, like a flag, challenged and urged Steen on. Desperately he struck, before the daze of Harney should vanish, and those loose hands become once more terrible. But though the head of Harney swayed back, though he pitched here and there with the powerful strokes, still no solid finishing blow could be landed.

And Steen, at last, ran in with wide-open arms, and gripped his man.

Let it be said then that he felt less elation than horror as he felt the huge body of Harney yield under his grasp! The rigid might that arched the chest and ridged the limbs of Harney now was gone. He was like pulp in the grasp of Steen.

And Steen paused, feeling the life of this man in his hand. Once before, his own life had been about to slip into the ocean, and this was he who had saved him. He thought of that, and of the strong man who had marched with him across the snows, and struggled with him down the dangers of the Yukon and its lakes.

But he thought of the lovely face of Kate, and instantly he was all steel.

And he shouted at the swaying, contorted face of Harney: "Are you through, Harney? Have you got enough?"

He saw the other steady a little, and with a far-off look, Harney rallied himself for the end.

In place of an answer in words, he managed to get one weak arm free, and struck the hand futilely into the iron face of Steen.

And Steen laughed.

He thrust his right arm behind the shoulder of Harney. The right hand he curled across, until it gripped the big throat of the man, now soft as the throat of a child. Then, exerting his full pressure, he bore backward, and Harney collapsed under the strangle hold.

Together they crashed to the ground as two forms slid from beneath the trees into the open—Chinook, and the girl just behind him.

Her cry came before her upon Steen and he gave back before it as though he had been clubbed in turn.

But he had not yet come to his feet when she threw herself on Joe Harney. He saw her arm passed under the head of the fallen man. He saw her touch the purple-stained lips and cherish the battered face with her hand.

In agony she listened for the heart-beat—heard the flutter of it—and at last raised her face to Steen.

"You black-faced fiend!" she cried at him. "You murderer! You coward!"

"Kate——" he said, and would have come a step closer to her, but Chinook, snarling like a fiend, was crouched before him, ready as a snake to strike.

So Steen looked gloomily upon them both, and slowly backed away. There was murder and there was a frightful grief in his heart, but he could not take his eyes from them.

The dog, too, had dragged himself beside his master, and licked the wounded face. A face disfigured, a face swollen and battered by many blows—never a handsome face at best! And yet the girl hung over him as if he were a prince from a fairy tale.

Another shadow came through the shadow of the trees beside him, and he turned with a start toward Winslow. The latter looked calmly at the wounded face of Steen, and again at the group on the ground. Then he nodded.

And Steen knew that whether from that one glance or from what Kate had told him before, Winslow understood perfectly.

"We've left the old heroic age, it appears," said Winslow. "We've come to sentimental times, it appears, Steen. But children, dogs, and women are apt to lean toward the simple hearts which are capable of blind service. Eh? Or, in the words of the old song, the longest way round is the sweetest way home. Or have I quoted that correctly?"

THE END.

LESSENING THE SNAKE PEST

PRACTICAL ranchmen of west Texas have found a way of lessening one of the pests that prey upon their sheep and goat herds. And that by evicting the unwelcome tenants bodily from their homes. When winter comes, the rattlesnakes that make life unpleasant to the ranchers and their flocks, dig into their rock caverns for the winter, where they are practically secure until the coming of warm weather brings them out again to take their place in the sun.

But those winters of security are threatened. For the ranchers now send out snake posses armed with dynamite which is inserted in the crevices of the rattlers' hiding places and when a shower of rocks is thrown into the air the snakes are plainly visible. Those which somehow escape the explosion, are caught in various ways and soon put an end to. Due to this method snakes are decreasing.

Two Bad Men

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "What the Mounty Brought In," etc.

LACK of confidence had never been one of "Lefty" Bond's failings. Life—as he knew it—had taught him that an appearance of confidence counts for a great deal. Of course, courage of a sort was necessary, too; also, a certain skill in the manipulation of those natural weapons of offense and defense that serve to establish a man in his proper niche wherever men congregate.

Until he came to Rock City, Lefty had never been farther West than Chicago. The fact that Rock City was one of the West's newest gold-boom towns, and that its rough and ready population would, without doubt, be hard-boiled, concerned Lefty Bond not at all. He was quick with his fists, skilled in the use of that little blue steel automatic which he always carried, and, with the confidence of youth, he feared no man.

Although for several years Lefty had made a living by his wits, he was not by choice a crook. As a matter of fact, the object of his journey to Rock City was honest and above board. Much gold had been found there. He intended digging for gold, too.

Lefty's introduction to Rock City followed closely the lines he had expected.

As he stood before the pine-board desk in the Olympia Hotel along with a dozen other new arrivals, bargaining for a place to sleep, he became aware of stealthy fingers exploring his person. Lefty's experience with pickpockets was comprehensive, to say the least. Although hemmed in on all sides by jostling men, he caught the would-be thief's wrist and turned quickly, snatching the automatic from his vest pocket even as he turned.

It was indeed fortunate for Lefty that he pulled his gun as he turned for, as

he swung about, he found the owner of those light fingers reaching for a long-barreled six-gun. The pickpocket was a hatchet-faced, evil-looking scoundrel, dressed in the clothes of a miner. That six-gun slid into the thief's hand with amazing quickness; but Lefty was a split second quicker. The automatic in his left hand barked. The six-gun dropped from the thief's fingers. There was a tiny blue hole formed by the steel-jacketed bullet in the crook's hand. The crowd scattered. Lefty laughed. Balancing his gun in his left hand, his eyes swept the circle of startled faces, finally coming to rest on the hatchet-faced thief.

"You picked the wrong guy, 'Eagle-beak,'" he said calmly. "Trot along now, or I'll get rough with you."

For a single instant the disconcerted pickpocket hesitated, then, as the interested crowd about the doorway scattered precipitately to admit a big man who wore a tiny gilt star on his blue-flannel shirt, he scurried away like a frightened rabbit and was soon lost to sight.

Even to Lefty's unfamiliar eyes that gilt star meant something. The marshal, probably. Thumbs locked in belt, United States Marshal "Silent Jim" Abbetz, shouldered his way through the crowd and up to Lefty's side. The big man did not speak; he merely looked down at Lefty inquiringly. Lefty swallowed hard and essayed a grin.

"A dip," he exclaimed, "tried to riffle me. I caught him in the act."

The marshal nodded. "And you plugged him," he said.

"In the hand," Lefty admitted. "He drew first."

Silent Jim Abbetz chewed his mustache thoughtfully. He turned to the clerk behind the desk.

"I didn't see what went on," the clerk said, anticipating the marshal's question, "but I'd say that the kid was right. The other feller was 'Bat' Brawley. 'Nuff said——"

The gray-haired marshal nodded. Then, once more, he turned his attention to Lefty Bond. Still without speaking, he looked that young man over from head to foot. Finally, he reached into Lefty's pocket and helped himself to the automatic pistol. He inspected the weapon curiously. "Heard about these things," he muttered. "Heard about the fellers who use 'em, too! Rock City ain't holdin' open house for city gunmen, young feller. O' course, I ain't sayin' that that's what you are," he hastened to add; "but this here gun ain't no tenderfoot's plaything like can be bought at a mail-order house. It's a he-gun. An' it 'pears like you know how t' use it. But I wouldn't do no promiscuous shootin', if I was you, son. 'Tain't goin' t' be healthy in this man's town for gun fighters and sech."

The marshal returned the gun, then swung about and walked away.

Lefty was angry. To be detected for what he was by a "hick" officer in a public place filled him with unreasoning rage. What if he did carry a gun? What if he did know how to use it? He had come to Rock City with the most innocent intentions. He would not have used that gun if he had not been forced to use it. City gunman, eh? Perhaps he was. But he had never killed a man——

Lefty was still angry when he started out into the hills early next morning. All during the evening he had been the cynosure of curious eyes. A dozen times he had been pointed out on the street. Swaggering two-gun men—evidently natives of this land of mud and rock—eyed him respectfully. On the edge of the town, two motherly looking women with market baskets on their arms scuttled off the boardwalk at his approach.

Swearing under his breath, he hurried on.

The latest strikes had been made in the hills half a dozen miles out of Rock

City. An old sour-dough miner named Wentworth had stumbled upon a veritable bonanza there. And the entire population of the camp, like sheep, had turned their attention from the overcrowded Rock City diggings to the Larejo Hills. Lefty had no intention of staking a claim immediately. He did not know gold-bearing ore when he saw it. First of all, he must learn something about gold and then the business of mining.

He stopped a dozen times during the morning at various diggings along the way. But he did not learn much from the busy men there engaged. They all seemed to be feverishly excited and watched him with open distrust. They answered his questions with monosyllables and seemed relieved when he went on.

It was mid-afternoon when he finally reached the hills. He had, in some manner, angled away from the beaten trail. For an hour or so he did not come upon a single camp. It was dusk when he found himself at the edge of a black-shadowed spruce thicket on a ridge half a mile above the valley and Rock City. It was very quiet there in the thicket. There was a pleasant aroma of trees and moist earth in the air. Not since he was a kid had Lefty Bond been so far away from a city. He liked it. Breathing deeply of the sweet-scented air, he sat on a fallen log, lit a cigarette, and puffed serenely.

"Gee, ain't it quiet?" he muttered. The sound of his own voice surprised him with its loudness.

And that sky! He had never seen anything so blue. A hawk or an eagle spiraled up out of the thicket and climbed to a dizzy height. Lefty watched with all his eyes. The forgotten cigarette burned his fingers. He dropped it and stamped it out.

The lengthening shadows finally warned him that he should be moving. Just as he got to his feet, he heard the sound of voices, harsh, ugly, commanding! Then there was a roaring report.

Lefty had no idea from which direction the shot had come. Gun in hand, he started tentatively back toward the town. He recalled the old marshal's veiled warning and thrust the automatic back in his pocket. Whatever the cause of that shot, it was not his fight. The sooner he got away, the better for Lefty Bond!

As he went, his step quickened. So it was that, as he rounded a bend in the rocky trail, he blundered out into the open upon the very thing he had sought to avoid, before he could stop.

In a flash, the unpleasant picture before him was photographed upon his mind. Two roughly dressed, burly men stood over another man, who lay flat upon his back among the rocks. The victim of the evident holdup was an old man. His long, white hair hung pitifully down over his shoulders. His face was white and there was a smear of red on one cheek. The old fellow was out, cold, no question of that. Perhaps he was dead? The two men were going through the old man's clothes.

The robbers had not yet seen Lefty. Ordinarily, his first thought would have been flight. This was none of his business. One of the most hard-and-fast rules in his crude code of ethics consisted of what amounted to almost a passion for minding his own business. Curiously enough, however, now the possibility of going away and leaving that old man in the hands of those two crooks did not occur to him. The poor old coot! A danged shame, that's what it was!

Scarcely aware of what he was doing, Lefty's fingers found his gun. The distance was too great for accurate shooting. He took several steps forward. The loose gravel rattled under foot. Both thieves turned at the same instant.

"Reach!" Lefty commanded.

Neither obeyed that command. Again

acting in mysterious unison, the right hands of both men reached toward the guns in their belts. Lefty's automatic barked sharply. He fired two shots. Both went wild. The distance was still too great for the little gun. The thieves' six-guns roared at almost the same instant. Something struck Lefty on his upper arm, and he knew that he was hit. But it was only a scratch. He dropped flat on his face as the six-guns roared again. Both shots flew harmlessly over his head. And then, before those guns could locate him, he rolled swiftly toward a moss-covered boulder alongside the trail. Just as he reached his objective, twin reports sounded again. One of the bullets struck the rock behind which he crouched.

He had come perhaps a dozen feet nearer the two bandits by this rapid move. The distance was still great, but Lefty was an expert with the little pistol. There were still nine shots in that gun. Nine steel-jacketed messengers of death! He lay still for a moment, breathing hard, tensing for the attack. Two more bullets sought him out; but neither came uncomfortably close. He got slowly to his knees. Then, gun tightly clutched in his left hand, he sprang to his feet. The instant his left hand appeared above the top of the moss-covered boulder, his little weapon began to spout fire and bark with the rapidity of a machine gun.

Several of those bullets found their mark, although with what effect Lefty could not tell. One of the bandits dropped his gun, and stumbled back against the rocky wall. The other caught at his side with his free hand and doubled up as though in pain. Lefty reloaded.

But it was almost immediately evident that a second dose was not necessary. The two bandits, as with one accord, suddenly recovered, and hurriedly disappeared in a thicket of sumac shrub near at hand.

Lefty waited until he was sure that the men had gone for good, then he came forward, picked the old man's limp body up in his arms and returned with his burden to the boulder, from which spot a view of the ridge trail in all directions could be had.

Hasty inspection disclosed that the old man was not seriously injured. A slug from one of the six-guns had creased his temple, but the wound was not deep. Just as Lefty was considering the possibility of locating some water, the injured man began to show signs of returning life. Lefty lit a cigarette and watched his patient with solicitous eyes. "Poor ol' cuss!" he muttered, and poor the wounded man surely appeared to be. His clothes, although clean, were old and ragged. His dilapidated felt hat was full of holes. But it was his hands that served most to excite Lefty's sympathy. They were gnarled and knotted, and calloused almost beyond belief. "Poor ol' cuss!" Lefty muttered again. "Them bozoes must've been hard up t' pick on a ol' scarecrow like you."

With a groan, the injured man struggled up on one elbow. His left hand felt about his waist. "Gone!" he muttered; then the film that dimmed his gray eyes disappeared. He blinked rapidly several times and stared up at Lefty. After a bit, he smiled. "What of it?" he muttered. "Plumb forgot, I did! Yes, sir, plumb forgot I was a rich man. Heh! Heh!"

Lefty shook his head sympathetically. "Take it easy, old-timer," he said, "you got kind of a nasty wallop on the dome. You'll be feelin' pretty groggy for a while. Just lay still for a few minutes, then, if you feel up to it, I'll give you a hand and we'll go away from here. Where's your cabin?"

The old man's pale eyes were seemingly riveted on Lefty Bond's face. He pointed over his shoulder with his thumb. "You saved my life," he said.

Lefty shrugged. "Naw," he said, "they wouldn't've plugged you again."

The old miner smiled wanly. "Yes, they would," he contradicted. "I know 'em. I know 'em both. They knew I recognized 'em. No, sir. they would never have left me alive."

Lefty grunted. "Gee," he muttered, "there sure is some hard guys in this neck of the woods. Did they clean you?"

The old miner nodded. "Yes, he said, "but I don't care. Not no more, that is. I'm a rich man now, son. A few hundred dollars don't mean so much as it used to. I'm 'Dad' Wentworth."

Lefty grinned and thrust out his hand. "Pleased t' meetcha," he said. "I'm Lefty Bond."

Dad Wentworth took the younger man's hand. "Mebbe you heard o' me?" he asked.

"Seems like I have, now you mention it." Lefty admitted. "You're the ol' boy what started the stampede up in the Larejo Hills, ain't you?"

Dad Wentworth nodded. His pale eyes still remained fixed with a curious sort of intensity on Lefty's beardless face. "Are you prospectin'?" he finally asked.

Lefty nodded. "Yeah," he said, "that's what I came to Rock City for. But I wouldn't know a chunk o' gold ore if somebody put it in my hand. All new t' me, this stuff is. Figured I'd look around some for a week or so just to kind of get the hang o' things; but you can't get near enough to any o' these fellers to learn anything'. They treat you like you had smallpox or somethin'."

Dad Wentworth was still watching the young man's face. "I know," he said; "but you can't blame them, son. They're madmen. Gold mad. It can be a terrible disease. In fact, it affects most men that way. Makes fools and madmen outta reg'lar people. But, like I say, they can't help it. You can't blame 'em. It's really human nature, that's all."

Lefty crushed out the cigarette beneath his heel and reached for a fresh one.

"But there's plenty for everybody here," the old miner went on. "Them hills is full o' gold. I know it. I've always known it. O' course, it's hard t' find. An' you've gotta know gold-bearin' ore when you see it in order t' have even half a chance. Even then you can't be sure o' makin' a strike. I prospected them hills for twenty year before I found it. Even then they beat me to it. Some chechahco struck pay dist down there in the valley just kind of offhand like, six months before I made my strike. He was a minin' engineer, that feller. Yes, sir, you gotta learn lots o' things. Even then you can't be sure o' makin' a strike. But you can, at least, learn what gold-bearin' ore is when you see it."

The purple dusk had been replaced by starry night by the time Lefty, half carrying, half dragging the injured old miner, reached the latter's cabin. As Lefty had prophesied, the old fellow was dizzy, sick, and weak, as a result of his injury. Once inside the cabin, however, the old man seemed to take on a new lease on life.

"Home!" he muttered. "No matter how humble they ain't no place like home, Lefty."

Lefty Bond, busily engaged washing his face and hands, laughed. "You can't prove it by me, old-timer," he said, "but you're probably right."

"Meanin' you ain't got no home, son?" the old man pursued.

"Somethin' like that," Lefty agreed. "But you lie down there on that bunk and keep your mouth shut. Talkin' is hard work for a sick man. You just lie down there an' take a nap while I rustle some eats for you."

Whistling as he worked, Lefty unstrapped his own pack and prepared sup-

per. The contents of that pack had cost him, literally, their weight in gold. There was, for instance, a venison steak for which he had paid three dollars a pound. Although he was hungry, he placed this steak to boil on the old sheet-iron stove. It had been a long time since he had done any cooking, but he knew that this was the proper way to make a broth. Something like that—good, rich, meat broth—was what old Dad Wentworth needed.

The injured man did not speak. He lay very still, flat on his back on the bunk, and followed Lefty's movements with his eyes. Occasionally, he instructed the younger man where to find this or that.

Lefty had intended leaving immediately after supper. But he did not go. He sat on and on, listening to his white-haired host's happy philosophies, smoking, and inhaling deeply the aromatic night air. The cabin was situated in the center of a fir thicket. Above the tops of the trees, the blue-black sky, studded with twinkling stars, rested like a drop curtain, Lefty thought, hiding the ugly world beyond.

"It sure is swell up here!" he finally said. "No wonder you like it, old-timer. If I stick around, I'm comin' up t' see you often."

Dad Wentworth, who had bucked up amazingly—considering his age—puffed in silence on his pipe. "Why not stay for a while. Lefty?" he finally suggested. "It gits plumb lonesome up here sometimes. Mebbe I can show you suthin' about gold minin'. Anyhow," he hastened to add, "I owe you a lot—more than I can ever repay. I ain't gonna offer you money. I don't expect you'd take it. But——"

"Naw, I couldn't do that," Lefty interrupted. "Why," he laughed, "the marshal would be up here and drag me away to the hoosegow. He's already got his eye on me. He'd think I was plannin' on throwin' the hooks into you."

Dad Wentworth's wrinkled face wore a perplexed frown. "What d'you mean?" he asked.

Lefty explained, briefly, the affair in the Olympia Hotel.

Dad Wentworth grunted. "Don't let that worry you none, Lefty," he said. "Silent Jim Abbetz is a square shooter. He's hard an' all that; but he never yet jugged an innocent man."

Lefty Bond laughed. "I've heard all of that stuff before," he said, "an' it's a lot of apple sauce. I'm tellin' you, old-timer, if I hung around here for a couple o' days that marshal would be loafin' around with his tongue stickin' out, watchin' for me to stick you in the back an' light out with your money."

Dad Wentworth shook his head sadly. "You're wrong, son," he said quietly. "Silent Jim Abbetz ain't like that. Anyhow, I wish you'd stay."

Something warm stirred around Lefty's heart. There was no mistaking the sincerity behind the old miner's request. Hospitality was a word with which Lefty Bond was only vaguely familiar. Friendship was, to him, a joke. Home was a thing used as the basis for most sob stories. Twenty years since he had gained his first conscious impressions of life in an orphan asylum; from the orphanage he had graduated to a reform school; from the reform school, logically enough, to jail. Hospitality, friendship, home—he didn't know what any of them meant. And here, in this little cabin high up in the Montana hills, he was, for the first time in his life, faced with all three. A queer feeling came over the youth. Something suspiciously like a mist blurred his eyes. At first, he thought he was ill. The altitude, perhaps——

But he knew this was not the answer. It was an almost incomprehensible longing, hidden deep within him, that caused him to feel so queerly. The truth of the matter was, he liked the white-haired old man there on the bunk. He liked

those trees, the blue sky, the stars, the sweet-smelling air, the homy old cabin. He wanted to stay right here—forever.

And stay, Lefty Bond did—on and on. As a matter of fact, after that first night he never thought of leaving without an inward sinking sensation such as a man feels when threatened with the loss of all he holds dear. For, within the space of a few days, old Dad Wentworth, the little cabin among the firs, the blue hills, the glorious sunshine, all had become integral parts of Lefty Bond's very being. He loved Dad Wentworth as he might have loved the father he had never known. He enjoyed the hard work of digging for gold in the stubborn earth. That rough little cabin was home to him.

Many other more subtle changes took place in Lefty Bond in the weeks that followed. For the first time in his life he came to know what unselfishness was. Dad Wentworth was a living example of unselfishness. And, going hand in hand with this pleasant lesson, Lefty learned to experience the vast satisfaction which goes with doing for others. Although still strong, both mentally and physically, Dad Wentworth was, nevertheless, an old man; there were many things which it was difficult for him to do. These things, these responsibilities, Lefty gladly took over. He worked the heavy windlass which brought huge bucketsful of muddy gravel up from the bottom of Dad's prospect. He chopped wood, carried water, and cooked most of the meals. Lefty did these things willingly, more than willingly. And Dad Wentworth reciprocated by treating Lefty Bond as that cynical, world-wise young man had never been treated before.

For three months they worked thus—Dad Wentworth, the kindly old philosopher, and Lefty Bond, the graduate of reform schools and city jails—side by side, in closer harmony of understanding than most fathers and sons. And during this time Lefty became a new man.

Not once during this period had mention been made of money. Although working eight to twelve hours a day in Dad Wentworth's mine, Lefty had never given the matter of compensation for his services a thought. In this new and vastly pleasant life, money meant little. Dad periodically visited Rock City for supplies. The old man paid for them himself. All of which seemed fair enough to Lefty. He would have been perfectly willing to have continued in the same manner for the rest of his natural life.

Unfortunately, however, life does not follow smooth channels. Always there are the rapids and the rough spots through which a man must struggle.

It was June when Dad, about to start for Rock City for necessary supplies, suggested that Lefty go with him.

"But it ain't safe t' leave the dust here," Lefty argued.

"We'll take it with us," the old man said. "Should've done it long ago. Time it was in a bank."

But it was not delivery of the hundred pounds or so of gold dust to the bank in Rock City that was behind Dad's suggestion that Lefty accompany him. Lefty sensed something in the wind; but he did not give the matter a second thought until the old miner led the way abruptly into a lawyer's office above a hardware store.

Here, a legal-looking document was submitted to Lefty for his signature. He read the typewritten form through carefully. Stripped of its legal verbiage, the paper stated that John Henry—Dad—Wentworth and Joseph—Lefty—Bond were partners, on a fifty-fifty basis, in the various gold claims, et cetera, et cetera, now registered in the name of John Henry—Dad—Wentworth. Lefty could scarcely believe his eyes. He protested, but to no avail. Finally, with honest reluctance, he signed his name to the document.

"There ain't no ifs an' ands about it,

Lefty," Dad argued; "I ain't got no kith or kin. I'm an old man. I'm apt t' drop off. suddenlike, most any day. Which same explains the will I just made, leavin' everythin' t' you. Now, don't argue! When my mind is made up on a thing, I'm plumb sot about it. You ought t' know that by this time."

"But——" Lefty began. Then he stopped. No, he could not say what he wanted to say. If he told Dad about his past now, it would distress the kindly old fellow cruelly. And, after all, why not let sleeping dogs lie? He was all in the clear. He had served time for every job he had done. The law did not want him; and he would see to it that never, through act of his, would the law again be interested in his movements. No, he could not tell the old man. As a matter of fact, he would far rather cut off his hand than have Dad Wentworth know just how crooked he had been.

So Lefty scrawled his name on that document which made him a full partner with Dad Wentworth in one of the most profitable claims in the Larejo Hills. But fate decreed that Lefty Bond's past should not be so readily forgotten.

Three days later there was a visitor at the little claim in the hills. Covered with dirt, Lefty had just emptied a bucket of wet gravel from the bottom of the shaft out upon the ground, when the sound of hoarse-voiced laughter caused him to turn. He saw a big, black-whiskered man standing a rod away, his hands on his hips, laughing.

"Croesus, Jr.," the big man chortled. "Mr. John Henry Wentworth and Mr. Joseph Bond Incorporated. Har, har, har! Lefty Bond, mine owner! Lefty Bond—— Ho, ho, ho!"

"'Keg' Ruckert!" Lefty exclaimed. He brushed the back of his hand over his eyes as though to remove that unpleasant resurrection of his dead past. "Keg Ruckert!" he repeated.

Ruckert laughed again. "Well, what of it?" he sneered. "Ain't you glad t' see your ol' pal?"

Lefty placed his forefinger on his lips.

"Oh, so that's it," Ruckert grinned. "Playin' a waitin' game, eh? The ol' boy is down there in that hole, an' you don't want him t' hear us talkin'. In other words, Wentworth, don't know who you are!"

"That's right, Keg," Lefty said in a low voice. "He doesn't know. An' he ain't gonna know. Understand? I'm on the level in this thing, Keg. Me an' Dad Wentworth is partners, just like you said. We're gonna stay partners. You're gonna keep your mouth shut!"

Just for an instant the laughter left Keg Ruckert's face. Then, his eyes puckered into a crafty squint. He nodded slowly. "I git you," he said. "You always was a wise one, Lefty. You've got the old rooster buffaloed. An' I sure gotta hand it to you, because, I understand, the old boy ain't nobody's fool. He——"

Lefty Bond silenced Ruckert with an impatient gesture. "You're all wrong, Keg," he said. "I tell you, I'm on the level. An' I'm tellin' you once more, just so you'll be sure an' get it straight—Wentworth don't know who I am, an' he ain't gonna know. Do I need t' talk any plainer than that?"

Lefty had come close to Ruckert. He stood now less than three feet away, and at what he saw in the younger man's white face, Ruckert backed a step. "Meanin' you're playin' a lone hand an' that you ain't gonna split with a pal?" he rumbled.

"Pal!" Lefty sputtered. "You ain't no pal o' mine, Keg, an' never was. You know it. You've always been a snake in the grass. You've always known what I thought of you. As I remember it, I told you several times just where you stood with me. Right now, you're just a little bit less than nothin'. I'm tellin' you for the third an' last time: get outta

here an' stay out. An' keep your mouth shut. If you so much as let a word outta you, in town or any place else, about me, I'll——"

"Well?" Ruckert prompted.

"I'll drill you on sight!" Lefty warned through tight lips.

A querulous voice sounded from the bottom of the shaft. Lefty called a cheerful reply and turned away. Ruckert slowly retraced his steps down the rocky slope.

If it had not been for the bad whisky which was the only liquor to be had in Rock City, Keg Ruckert would probably have kept silent, for he was at heart a coward, and he knew that Lefty Bond was a man of his word. The whisky was what did it. Under its influence Keg Ruckert talked. Lefty's first knowledge of this came from that most impressive of all sources, Silent Jim Abbetz. The old offcer appeared at the cabin one night at dusk.

"I want to talk to you alone, kid," he said.

Lefty Bond moistened his dry lips nervously. All too well he knew what the marshal wanted to talk about. "Ruckert has been talkin'," he blurted.

The marshal nodded. "Yes," he said, "Ruckert's been talkin', and he said plenty."

"What—what——" Dad Wentworth began.

Lefty turned to the old man. "Just a minute, Dad," he said. For a long minute he sat there, hands tightly clenched, thinking. Just once did he look up to find the old miner's pale eyes watching him. Then he shrugged and laughed.

"Well, it's all over, I guess," he said in a hopeless voice. "Shoot the works, marshal!"

Silent Jim Abbetz hesitated. "I kinda wanted to talk to you alone," he said again.

Lefty shook his head. "No," he said, "that ain't the game at all. Dad would hear about it, sooner or later. I'd rather have him know right now."

The officer's keen eyes rested sympathetically on the younger man. "I dunno," he muttered. "I dunno."

"Go ahead, shoot!" Lefty repeated. "Ruckert's been sayin' that I am—that I was—a crook. Well, he's right. I've been in stir three times. An' every time I was guilty. That's the story, ain't it?" he concluded with a grin half of bravado, half of shame.

The marshal nodded. "Yes," he said, "that's about the size of it. But I was kinda hopin' it warn't so, son."

"Not a chance," Lefty Bond sneered. "Not a chance in the world. But, I've done time for everything, marshal. I'm all in the clear. So help me, I've played square with Dad."

The marshal coughed. "You threatened Ruckert," he said.

"Sure I did," Lefty admitted, "and why not? The double crosser! You would have done the same thing. Or, no, maybe you wouldn't, at that," he admitted. "Probably a regular guy would have come clean with Dad in the first place. But I just couldn't do it, marshal. Everythin' was so nice here, I—I just couldn't do it."

"Well, he has talked. What are you goin' to do about it?" the marshal pursued.

Lefty shrugged hopelessly. "Search me," he admitted. "I told him I'd kill him. Maybe I'll do—just that."

"That bein' the case——" the marshal began.

"Forget it, marshal," Dad Wentworth interrupted. "I can't see where this affair of Lefty's is any o' your business at all. He ain't done nothin'. Jest some loose talk, threatenin' like. I'm satisfied. Where do you come in?"

Utterly flabbergasted by this statement from the old miner, Silent Jim Abbetz merely stared, open-mouthed. "Why—why——" he began. "I expect you're right, Dad," he admitted; "only

I kinda figgered you wouldn't feel easy in your mind havin' a feller what had done time——"

"What if he has done time?" Dad Wentworth interrupted brusquely. "Didn't you never do nothin' you was ashamed of? O' course you did. Got over it, though, didn't you? Lived it down. Well, Lefty, he's sorry he done them things, whatever they was. I know. I know lots o' things he don't even think I know. He's my partner, marshal, an' my friend. It takes more than words, spilled about promiscuous-like by a loose-tongued drunk, to shake my faith in my friends."

Marshal Jim Abbetz took his leave an hour later, a badly puzzled man. "The old dolt," he muttered to himself, "he's just lookin' for trouble!"

But there were no signs of trouble that night in Dad Wentworth's cabin. Lefty did not offer to amplify the statements he had made to the marshal; and the miner did not ask for further details. Just before retiring, Dad threw an arm affectionately about his young partner's shoulders. That was all. Neither of them spoke. There was, in fact, no need for words.

In the days that followed, however, both men were troubled. And, as is so often the case, each misinterpreted the cause of the other's distress.

It was on the third day after the marshal's visit that Dad Wentworth went to town. There was no apparent reason for his making this trip. All day, Lefty was nervous and restless. When night came and the old man had not returned, he paced before the cabin like a caged animal. What was wrong? What had happened?

At last, shortly after midnight, he caught up his hat and started to town.

The sun had been up an hour by the time he reached Rock City. As luck would have it, one of the first men he saw was Silent Jim Abbetz. Lefty breathlessly approached the officer.

"Dad!" he almost shouted. "He's gone! Have you seen him?"

Silent Jim Abbetz's icy-blue eyes inspected the younger man's haggard face. But he did not speak. He merely pointed over his shoulder.

Lefty shrugged impatiently. "I don't get you. Say something, man! Is he hurt?"

Abbetz shook his head slowly. "No," he said; "he's in jail."

"Jail!" Lefty echoed. "Why, you're crazy, marshal! Dad wouldn't hurt a fly. What——"

"He shot and killed Keg Ruckert," the marshal said.

"Ruckert! Keg Ruckert!" Lefty repeated. "Dad killed Keg Ruckert!" Then, a half smile twitched across his white face. "That was what I came down t' see you about, marshal," he said in a voice that was even and calm. "I killed Ruckert! Dad would do anythin' in the world for me. He's takin' the blame. I was afraid he would. But I did it, marshal. I, myself, killed Ruckert!"

Not by word or sign did Abbetz indicate his reaction to this startling confession. "All right," he said, "that there makes sense. I didn't think Dad was the one what did it. But when a man comes to you an' gives himself up, why, they ain't much you can do."

Silently, Lefty handed the marshal his automatic pistol. For a moment the officer weighed the weapon in the palm of his hand. He was about to pass it back, then, apparently thought better of it.

"Was this what you done the killin' with?" he asked.

Lefty nodded.

The marshal continued to finger the gun. "I dunno, kid," he mused, as though talking to himself, "mebbe you'd better keep this. Still and all, it wouldn't be much good."

"What you drivin' at?" Lefty asked without interest.

"Just this," the marshal replied, "Ruckert made lots of friends in Rock City. Things got kinda hot last night. There was even talk of a necktie party. Ruckert did a lot o' talkin' about you. When his friends find that you're the feller what done him up, instead of Dad, they're apt to bust loose. O' course, I'll stay right with you to the last; but it ain't likely I can hold 'em off very long. Which bein' the case, I'd rather let you keep your gun and kick off a-fightin'. See what I mean?"

Lefty swallowed hard. He nodded.

"But this little pea-shooter wouldn't help you none. Perhaps I can dig you up a rifle."

Lefty laughed harshly. "No need for that," he said. "I don't hardly know one end of a rifle from another. I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a rifle."

For some strange reason the marshal seemed to smile. "Waal, then," he said. "I guess we'll have to sit tight. I'll keep this little gun o' yourn. If worst comes to worst, I'll give it back to you."

There were four steel-barred cells in the jail at the rear of the marshal's office. Lefty discovered Dad Wentworth sleeping on a bunk in one of these. He paused, debating whether or not to rouse his old friend. He finally turned to the marshal.

"You'll turn him loose right away, won't you, marshal?" he begged.

The officer shrugged doubtfully. "Mebbe so," he said.

"And, if you can get away with it, don't tell him about me. O' course, he'll learn about it sooner or later. But if this necktie party really comes off, I'd rather he didn't know, until it's all over."

Abbetz nodded. "All right," he said, "I won't tell him."

"An' don't let him see me," Lefty begged. "I don't want to talk to him. Understand?"

Again the marshal nodded.

Lefty could not see Dad Wentworth's cell from the cell in which he was placed. He did not know, therefore, whether or not the old man had been released. Despite the marshal's fears, the day passed quietly with no signs of a disturbance of any sort. Lefty Bond sat on the cot in his cell, staring at the wall before him. For hours he sat thus, so engrossed in his disturbing thoughts that he even forgot to smoke.

Shortly after midday the following day the marshal appeared, jingling several keys on a ring. He unlocked the door to Lefty's cell and beckoned. Lefty rose and followed his jailer.

As the marshal opened the door leading into his office, Lefty drew back and swore softly. Dad Wentworth was there. The old man stood, white-faced, breathing hard, beside the marshal's desk.

Abbetz took up his position in the middle of the room and looked from one to the other of the two confessed killers. "Waal," he said, "I'm all through with you two." He pointed toward the front door. "Git out of here!" he said.

The young man and the old one looked at each other.

"What?" Lefty cried.

Jim Abbetz scowled fiercely, but when he spoke his deep voice, despite its brusqueness, held a note of sympathetic understanding. He did not look at either of the men as he talked; instead, he appeared to be addressing a third party.

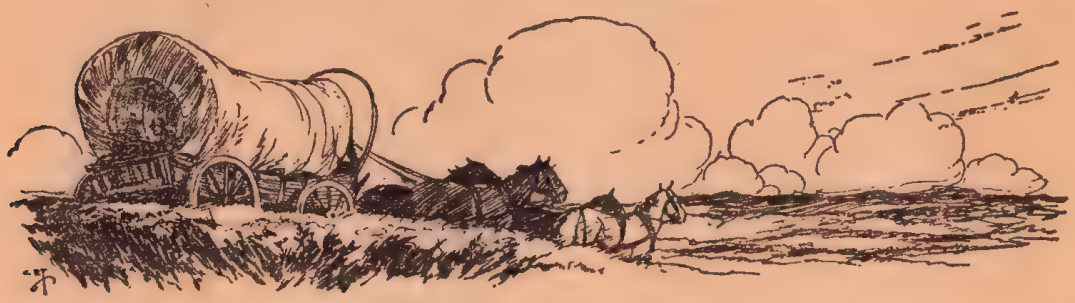
"Waal," he said, "this here old cocky-doodle told me he done the job—killed Ruckert—with a six-gun. And this here young 'un tells me he done it with a little pea-shooter of an automatic, an' steel-jacketed bullets. Ruckert was kilt with a .30-.30 Winchester rifle.

"An' anyhow," he concluded gruffly, "I already got the guilty man under lock and key. He slept between you two in that middle cell last night. I just fin-

ished talkin' with him. He confessed that he done it."

And, as the young man and the old one still tarried, "Now git outta here," the marshal ordered savagely; "an' don't let me catch you confessin' to no more murders. Or, by jingo, I'll run you in," he concluded, grinning.

Five minutes later, Lefty Bond and Dad Wentworth started back toward the hills, to a little cabin set in the center of a fir thicket—home.



HEROES OF PEACE

BRAVERY has no country; it is to be found all over the world. But it is of particular interest to know that Westerners have been conspicuous among those who were recently honored for heroic deeds by the Joseph A. Holmes Safety Association. Acts of heroism in the pursuit of duty, while not less meritorious, are often more likely to go unremarked than deeds of valor in battle, but there is not a day in the year that thrilling acts of bravery are not performed in everyday life.

For heroism displayed at a fire in the hoist house of the Teejon Copper Mine, in Gleason, Arizona, last year, E. J. Bellah, an Indian, and Michael Marchello, a fellow workmen, received gold medals. These men descended one thousand feet under ground to warn four miners working there of their danger.

The most generous of all men is he who gives his life to save his fellow man, and the above-mentioned association awards a gold medal especially in recognition of this valorous deed. Zeno Daley, an Apache Indian, who lost his life in attempting to go to the rescue of forty-nine men entrapped under ground in Shaft No. 2 of the Magna Copper Co., at Superior, Arizona, in 1927, was awarded this gold medal. The cable of the cage in which Daley was being lowered was burned through by the fire, and the brave Apache was hurled into the depths of the burning shaft.

Two brave men of Krebs, Oklahoma, John Stubblefield and David Keener, were also the recipients of gold medals. These men took part in the rescue of some of their comrades from a mine filled with poisonous gases.

An American, an Indian, and a Greek received silver medals for bravery shown in a feat which saved the life of James C. Doonan at the Sunrise Iron Mine of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Co., of Sunrise, Wyoming. The three men had climbed about sixty feet out of the pit after igniting fuses for blasting, when they noticed that Doonan had fallen back into it. Instantly they returned to the pit and in the face of imminent danger cut eight of the twelve fuses from charges of dynamite that might have exploded at any instant. They then protected their prostrate comrade from the flying rocks which were discharged by the explosion of the four remaining charges.

Many other instances might be cited in support of the poet's statement "that peace hath her victories no less renowned than war."

Pioneer Towns of the West

By Duane Clark

Fort Madison, Iowa

ON the west bank of the Misssissippi River, in the county of Lee, is the progressive city of Fort Madison, Iowa.

Lieutenant Alpha Kingsley came to Fort Madison in the fall of 1808 and began the construction of a fort. In a letter dated April 9, 1809, Kingsley described the fort as situated about twenty-five miles north of the confluence of the Mississippi and Des Moines Rivers. His letter is the first official evidence of the naming of the fort. The name was probably chosen in honor of James Madison, who had just been inaugurated president.

Four years prior to this, General W. H. Harrison had made a treaty with five of the leading chiefs of the Sac and Fox Indian tribes by which the government agreed to protect the rights of the tribes owning lands west of the Mississippi River. The Indians, naturally, felt that the erection of the fort was a violation of their agreement and soon began attacking the post.

So the fort, which contained only a hundred men, was constantly the subject of Indian warfare, and in September, 1813, it was abandoned. The men made their escape to the river through a tunnel. Nineteen years elapsed before another attempt was made to start a settlement. Then, the first cabin was erected at the foot of Black Hawk Heights on the banks of what is now known as Penitentiary Creek. General John Knapp and his cousin, Nathaniel Knapp, built a cabin here in the fall and began trading with the Indians.

As Fort Madison was in line with the route of the settlers coming to the Western frontiers, it rapidly developed into a large community. On January 9, 1838, the town was officially incorporated and named Fort Madison. The once warring Black Hawk was present at the first Fourth of July celebration.

He told the gathering assembled there that he was sorry he had tried to prevent the advance of civilization and would, in the future, assist the white men.

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Fort Madison was the only place north of St. Louis which was marked on the map. The oldest courthouse in the State of Iowa is located here. It was built in 1842. A few years before this, the government had authorized an appropriation of seventy thousand dollars for the building of a territory prison in Fort Madison. It was completed in 1841 and could accommodate one hundred and thirty-eight inmates, but it was not until eight years later that the first inmate was received. But, as the city has prospered and grown, so has the criminal class increased throughout the land, and Fort Madison now has a modern penal institution which ranks with the best in the country. Over eleven hundred inmates are incarcerated here.

On the one hundredth anniversary of the city, the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a stone chimney on the site where the old fort had its chimney. The original well, built by Lieutenant Kingsley and his company in 1808, is still in use.

A daughter of Betsy Ross, that famous pioneer woman who is credited with having made the first American flag, is buried at Fort Madison, and her great-granddaughter is a resident of Fort Madison.

Fort Madison's strategic location on transcontinental railway systems is an important factor in its development as an industrial center. Fort Madison was made a division point for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad in 1887 and maintains large railroad shops and yards in the city, giving employment to several hundred men. Fort Madison is also on the main line of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railway. During the summer months, large excursion boats afford residents and visitors an opportunity to travel up and down the historic Mississippi River.

Fort Madison's excellent transportation facilities both by rail and by water, and its location relative to the Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and St. Paul markets, command the attention of manufacturers who contemplate locating in the heart of the rich Middle West section of the United States. By either of these methods of transportation, their markets can be reached within ten to twenty-four hours.

The population of Fort Madison is estimated at thirteen thousand five hundred. There are five banks. In a newly erected Federal building is located a first-class post office. Three hotels accommodate visitors, and three fine theaters entertain both visitors and residents.

Fort Madison has the aldermanic form of government. Many things combine to make this city a place to be proud of. Among these are a modern fire department, twenty miles of paved streets, three hospitals, light and power furnished by the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world, and added to these a half-million-dollar water system.

In 1923 a modern high school was built at a cost of half a million dollars. In addition, Fort Madison has grammar schools, grade schools, parochial schools, and an up-to-date business college.

A railroad and wagon bridge across the Mississippi River connects Fort Madison, Iowa, with East Fort Madison, Illinois. The street railway and bus system in Fort Madison is said to be the best managed and to charge the lowest fare in the State.

Gas is used for industrial and household purposes. Fort Madison also has

a dock commission, which cares for the needs of river traffic as rapidly as they arise.

The social outlet of Fort Madison is a splendid country club with adjoining golf course, three civic clubs—Rotary, Lions, and Business—and the Professional Women's Club. All fraternal orders are well represented. Those, having their own club rooms, are the Masons, Elks, Eagles, Knights of Columbus, Moose, and American Legion. Fort Madison has two city parks and an excellent tourist camp site. Sixteen churches represent nearly every faith.

Among the leading industries of Fort Madison are a pen-and-pencil manufactory, a straw-paper and fiber box manufactory, a pearl-button factory, poultry-box factory, a manufactory of waxed-paper wrappers, a creamery, a foundry, and machine company, and factories for the making of beverages, sausage, and artesian ice.

TREES IN KANSAS

IN a recent report of the State board of agriculture of Kansas occurs the picturesque statement that Kansas now has more acres of woodland than it had when white men first looked over the land. This happy result has been brought about by the people of Kansas themselves. It began some fifty years ago when the State legislature established forestry stations at which seedling trees were grown for distribution. Not only were the people in cities and villages encouraged to plant trees, but the farmers were taught how to utilize ravines on their hilly farms by letting them run to trees and underbrush, thus preventing surface erosion. It was also found that in certain sections oak, walnut, pecan, and elm could be grown with profit.

A census shows that now Kansas has two hundred thirty million two hundred thirty-three thousand five hundred and sixteen trees, including fruit trees, and considerable wild timber—walnut, locust, cottonwood, catalpa, and the like.

It is said that the former treeless State of Kansas was unfortunately due to the wasteful—perhaps inevitably wasteful—methods of the early white settlers. A great deal of good cedar was cut up by them for corrals and cow yards. But these men were pioneers, who took what the land offered, and perhaps in their enthusiasm may be forgiven for believing that they had at last arrived in the land of plenty. The Indians are also said to have done no little damage, due to their habit of setting fires over large areas of ground so that roving tribes from the north would pass the land by, thinking it profitless. The cottonwoods which grow so luxuriantly in this State, while their commercial value is unimportant, are decidedly ornamental. Some few of these have become important tree "citizens" and their State is proud of them.

The Mustang

By Bob Wilson

Author of "Tricks of a 'Cuttin' Hoss," etc.

DOWN in Nevada they tell the story of a tenderfoot who came West to catch wild horses. It was during the Russo-Japanese War, when light horses were much in demand for the Japanese army. He alighted from a west-bound train at a small station in the Humboldt country—a pale-faced young man, who confided to the few cowboys and ranchmen lounging about the platform that he had come to catch wild horses.

Finding his audience sympathetic, he confided further that a doctor with a stethoscope was responsible for his coming to the high, dry climate of the Southwest. The thing had seemed to him impossible—since he had no funds to carry him over a long sojourn there—until he hit upon the plan of catching wild horses and selling them to the Japanese.

He had been raised on a farm and knew horses, and had given the project a thorough study—back East! He was confident that by going at the business in a systematic way, applying all his brains and energy to it, and giving it the same careful study that he would give to any other business proposition, he could catch the wild horses in large numbers. And, with mustangs bringing ten dollars a head, the profits would well be worth the effort.

The stockmen nodded their sombrero-covered heads. It was a good idea. And, as he said, there would be big money in it—if he could catch the horses! For the Western stockman is not one to cramp any one's style. No doubt, if some enterprising tenderfoot should come along and confide to one of them that he was going to move Pikes Peak over to Kansas, the Westerner would nod and say it was a good idea, that Kansas needed a mountain anyway.

So the optimistic visitor went blithely about his preparations for capturing the

wily mustang. Outfitting with saddle horse, pack burro, and two weeks' supply of grub, he rode away into the hills. He admitted that this was only a preliminary trip to get the lay of the land. Before beginning active operations he was going to make a thorough study of wild-horse nature. For he realized that to outwit the mustangs, he must know their every habit of life—where they grazed; where they watered; where they hid. And, too, he must learn why it was that cowboys, who were thoroughly familiar with their habits, found them so hard to catch.

Two weeks later, weary and disconsolate, he rode back to town. Bitterly he denounced those who spread the story that there were still wild horses running at large on that range. There was no such animal! For two weeks he had camped in the alleged wild-horse country, had ridden endless miles over wild mesas, and spent weary days lying in wait at watering holes. And he had not seen a single wild horse!

The ranchmen nodded gravely, as before. They had not calculated that he would.

But to-day the tenderfoot is a successful rancher and an experienced wild-horse hunter. The face once white with the dread disease is a healthy bronze. And he has learned why he did not see any mustangs on that first, fruitless ride. He has learned that, before he was within miles of a band, they had been warned by that mysterious telegraphic code of the wild—the warning bark of a prairie dog, relayed from hole to hole; a startled coyote loping away; a deer in flight; or a desert bird soaring aloft. All these, and many more, were the signals for the wild band to take flight. Perhaps it was only a sniff of man-tainted air carried across the sage, but it warned of danger, and the wild band takes no chance.

The above is an extreme case, for, ordinarily, in a day's ride through the wild-horse country, one will sight several bands. But it illustrates in a small degree why, in spite of the constant warfare waged against him, the wild horse is becoming a nuisance on the Western ranges. For of all wild things that run the earth, there is none more able to take care of himself than a wild horse. His senses of sight, smell, and hearing are developed to the highest degree. His speed is greater than that of any living animal. His endurance is phenomenal. He has the capacity of a camel for going without water. And, if forced to it, he can live for months in the most barren land, subsisting on a few mouthfuls of brush or moss a day.

In the desert regions of the Southwest, where water holes are few and far between, wild horses will go forty or fifty miles to water. The grass around these desert oases is cropped to the very roots for miles around. Consequently, the mustangs must hunt their living in remote corners of the range, where the grass is lush and beyond the reach of animals less inured to drought.

If necessary, mustangs can go two or three days without water. But, when thirst drives, the stallion rounds up his band at twilight, and—with an old mare and colt leading, while he falls behind to drive up the laggards—they cover the forty or fifty miles to water at a tireless gallop.

When within half a mile or so of the water hole, the band will suddenly halt and stand, statue-still, with ears erect, alert for possible danger. The stallion will now come up from the rear and, trotting back and forth, test the air with sensitive nostrils. Then, circling to another point, the band will repeat the performance. The stallion's challenging whistle pierces the stillness of the night and the mares stand aquiver, almost too eager to await the signal that all is safe. When assured that there is no danger, they gallop to the water and

plunge into it headlong, drinking in long, satisfying gulps, kicking, squealing, churning the water to mud. Other bands may come in during the night and there will be terrific battles between the stallions.

Most likely, they will stay around the water hole all night and the next day, drinking every few moments, rolling and splashing in the muddy water, till they have absorbed the last drop. Then, at night, they start on the long run back to the range for another three-day drought.

In these regions horse hunters sometimes take advantage of this scarcity of water to play a mean trick on the mustangs and bring them within reach of their ropes. Guarding or fencing the water holes—of which there may be not more than half a dozen in hundreds of square miles—they hold the horses away from the water, forcing them to run from hole to hole till they are exhausted and almost crazed from thirst. Then, hiding near, they let them get to the water, where the crazed animals drink until their sides are ready to burst, and muscles and wits are paralyzed. Now the riders on their fast horses race down on them, and the water-logged animals are helpless against the ropes that fall unerringly about their heads and feet, marking an end to their days of freedom.

But unless the wild bands are laboring under some sort of a handicap, it is practically impossible to run them down. Reckless young riders and thrill hunters like to give the mustangs a run, and occasionally get near enough to one to throw a rope on him. But aside from the thrills and excitement that it is guaranteed to give, this method is not one to be recommended for catching wild horses.

Sometimes, in trying to secure some particular horse, cowboys will try running him down in relays. A horse will rarely leave his home range, even in a crisis, and, no matter how hard pressed, he may be depended on to circle back in his flight. Riders who know wild-horse habits can station relays at favorable points, so a fresh horse and rider can be always ready to take up the chase when one tires.

But the roughest and most rugged part of the range is the haunt of the mustang, and even the wildest rider cannot keep him always in sight in the wild canyons and brakes he knows so well. He will elude the best of them and have time to rest and catch his wind before they find his trail and take up the chase again. Many riders have gained a new respect for the mustang's endurance, after running him a hundred miles or more and then watching him disappear in some wild arroyo, as fresh, apparently, as when he started.

The average mustang is not valuable enough to justify the outlay in horses and men necessary to run him down in relays. For the riders must limit their chase to a certain animal, which, in the end, will be their only reward. For the band will split up when hard pressed and each seek his own refuge. Then, a horse that has been run down in such a manner is not apt to be much good afterward, for the nervy mustang will run till he drops, and emerge from the ordeal broken in wind and spirit. His overtaxed muscles will never stand the strain of hard riding or work. There is a saying in the wild-horse country that, for every mustang caught, a good horse has been killed. And if men depended on running them down, this would be more than true. The experienced horse-hunter would take advantage of some such natural formation as that utilized by two cowboys in the Humboldt country.

This was a box canyon with sheer walls that opened into the mountains bordering the valley. A low ridge, extending into the valley, hid the opening. The cowboys built a few panels

of fence across the upper end of the canyon and strung a spool of wire with bits of rag tied to it from the opening to the river. They now had a trap that would hold hundreds of horses.

With half a dozen hired riders, they closed in on the wild bands from a large semicircle. Men stationed at strategic points kept them always headed down the valley, where, instead of escaping around the base of the mountain and back into the rough country, as they had always done before, they ran into the fence that turned them into the trap. Some three hundred head of wild horses were caught by the enterprising cowboys in this trap in a week's time.

But the wily mustangs soon learn of a hidden corral on their range. Always a few will escape from the first bands that are tricked into it, and they seem to spread the warning to every band on the range. Thereafter they will steer their course miles away from that danger spot.

More than one wild stallion has lost his freedom through a decoy—a trusty old mare, who is too faithful to be lured away, and who in eluding the attentions of the stallion will lead him into the wings of a corral. But it is a faithful mare, indeed, who can be depended on to decoy a wild king. More often he will herd her into his band and drive her off to the hills. In a short time she will be as wild as her wild companions, and harder to catch, for she knows the tricks of man.

Nearly every band has its quota of domesticated horses that have gone wild. They can be identified by the way they will hesitate and look back when startled, instead of bolting headlong as the wild ones do. More than one traveler has found himself marooned in the desert when a marauding stallion has stolen his horses.

Now and then a wild horse has been caught by creasing. This method requires the greatest skill with a rifle. Its success depends on hitting the animal in exactly the right spot—through the crest of the neck, six to eight inches behind the ears. If the marksman's aim has been good, the horse will turn a somersault and lie stunned long enough for the hunter to get a rope around his neck, and will recover in a short time with no bad effects from the wound.

Needless to say, more horses are killed by ambitious creasers than are ever caught. The marksman must hit a spot no more than two inches square, on a running target, anywhere from six hundred yards up. Half an inch too low and the horse will be killed. Half an inch too high and he will run away unharmed.

In the Northwest it is quite easy to run wild horses down in the deep, crusted snow of early spring, when they are weakened by their long struggle for existence during the hard winter. Riders on well-fed, sharp-shod horses can soon tire them out on the icy slopes and force them into a deep drift, where they will bog down, helpless and trembling, easy victims for the ropes.

But chasing wild horses over a range glazed with ice from the first spring thaw, where, to keep in sight of the wild band, a rider must go at full speed, leap fallen timber, jump over bluffs, and plunge through drifts that may conceal a dangerous drop-off, is a game guaranteed to thrill the most reckless. Some riders prefer to leave their saddles at home for a ride like this, but most of them will risk broken bones rather than the bouncing of a bareback ride. And they are lucky if they escape with only broken bones.

The writer knows two young fellows who are cripples for life from falls received while chasing wild horses. One, a strapping young giant, who would hang onto the tail of a wild band through any kind of country, plunged

over a bluff one day and horse and rider were piled up in a tangled mass forty feet below. He has never walked or ridden since, and, for some years afterward, could be seen on the streets of Portland, Oregon, operating a peanut-and-popcorn machine.

Another—a quarter-breed Indian, one of the best riders in the Northwest—was caught and doubled under his horse when he fell, and dragged for almost a mile. Though his back was broken, he lived. But he left the hospital a paralytic.

A less tragic accident was that of the young fellow in the Okanogan country of Washington whose leg was broken when his horse fell. As he was unable to get proper attention for it, the bone knit leaving the limb two inches shorter than the other. Two years later he had another fall, this time breaking the other leg in almost the same place. When he walked again he was surprised to find that he no longer limped. That leg, too, had shortened to the length of the other!

In the Northwest the horses are larger and of better grade than the desert mustangs of the Southwest. Most of them are descendants of domesticated horses that have gone wild, and there are many fine animals among them. Then, too, horses seem to develop to greater size in the more rigorous climate of the North. An eight-year-old gelding brought from New Mexico to Montana will grow one to two hundred pounds in weight and a full half hand in height. The same applies to cattle.

However, the desert mustang has also shown a marked improvement of late years. Constant infusion of the better blood of domesticated horses who have heeded the call of the wild has increased his size and modified the angular lines of neck and body. The original mustangs—presumed to be descendants of horses turned loose by the Spanish *conquistadores*—were misshapen little beasts of bone and sinews, assembled in grotesque angles, and weighing not more than six hundred pounds. And, though all wild horses pass under the general classification of mustangs in that section, it is doubtful if any of the pure blood are in existence to-day.

But no amount of modification has succeeded in taming the wild blood of the mustang. No effort of man has succeeded in exterminating him. Descendant of the finest strains bred by the ancient Moors, transported to America by the Spaniards, he survived and multiplied on the barren wastes of the New World. He grew smaller, less beautiful, with the passing generations, as his physical characteristics changed to meet the rigors of this new environment, but he retained and strengthened the spirit, courage, and intelligence of his forbears.

When the first hardy settlers pushed across the plains, the mustang was here, a challenge to man. He is here to-day, in greater numbers, still a challenge to man. When the deer, the elk, and the antelope are only a memory, he will be here still. For no other creature of the wild has the cunning, the endurance, the ability to survive, and the wit to combat man.

And as long as some wild canyon remains unfenced, or desert waste unclaimed, it is safe to say that occasional glimpses will be caught of some wild stallion—with still a trace of the indomitable blood of the mustang flowing in his veins—poised on the brink of a chasm, his mane blowing free, trumpeting his deathless challenge to man, who has not prevailed against him.

The Round-Up

FOLKS, we don't think that we've ever told you what any of the thousands upon thousands of readers of this magazine say to us every week about the John North department, "Where To Go and How To Get There."

Well, it's high time that we did, so here goes for some letters that we'll read right out to you, if old "White Chaps," over there by the fire, will throw on some light brush, so's we'll have light enough to spell out what a few of the folks have got to say about John and his work.

There, that's better. Thanks, White Chaps. We can do this little thing first rate now. Here goes for No. 1, and then for some more, right after it:

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have been an interested reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for the past two years. I always read your department for the information I can get concerning the different States of the West. I am interested in hunting, fishing, and trapping, and I think your department is the best place to get information regarding Arizona. O. SAETRE.
Route 5, Box 50, Decatur, Michigan.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: Although I have read the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for six years, I have never called upon you for any information. Now, after reading the courteous replies that you always give your readers, I am convinced that you are the man who can tell me what I need to know. G. J.
Oklahoma.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I enjoy your department. It is very interesting, and makes one feel as if he wanted to live in the West.
(MISS) CONNIE A. BAUSCH.
Colonial Inn, Addison, New York.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have been reading your department for nearly a year, and I sure do get a kick out of it.
ROY EDWARDS.
General Delivery, Irene, Texas.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: Have been reading your side of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for quite a while. It's the best of the magazine. G. S.
Grand Haven, Michigan.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: Your department is of more help to the public than you may think, for there are many persons desiring changes who cannot find the locations or the proper men to do business with.
K. R. WILLIAMS.
R. R. 2, Kearney, Nebraska.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have read the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a long time and have been interested in your work. Now I am placing myself on your list. L. M.
San Francisco, California.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have read, for a long time, your advice to others and wondered if your vast fund of information would help me. MRS. V. M. DODD.
Harviell, Butler County, Missouri.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have been a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for several years, and have enjoyed every copy that I have read. I have been a patient in government hospitals for more than four years and have read quite a few magazines and books in that time. I can say that none have given me more pleasure than the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. I am now taking the liberty of asking you about the climate and soil in the State of Utah. JAMES M. MATTHEWS.
Clinton, Arkansas.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: Have read your department in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE with much interest, so decided to come to you for help.
Thank you most sincerely for the help and advice I know you'll be able to give us.
A. N. WOODROW.
111½ Main Street, Kalispell, Montana.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I'm a constant reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and can say that my wife and I enjoy same very much. We enjoy your department more than any other. F. J. DUNLAP.
Box 632, Jasper, Alabama.

DEAR FRIEND NORTH: Your story about Alaskan reindeer was fine, and close to the facts of the industry. A. A. SELDEN.
Pacific Grove, California.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: As I am a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, I ofttimes see the good advice you are giving others.
A. C. WEAVER.
323 A Street, Springfield, Oregon.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: Having been a reader of your splendid magazine for some time, and observing the accuracy and reliability of the information you give from time to time, I beg to inquire regarding the city of Great Falls, Montana. W. A. H.
Box 1, White Rock, British Columbia, Canada.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: Thanks, Mr. North, for the good words you have passed on this country, and also for the most accurate write-up you had on Rolla, British Columbia. It is good stuff, and the people up here appreciate it. A. C. EGAN.
Spirit River, Alberta, Canada.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have been reading your "Where To Go and How To Get There" for a long time. It sure is interesting, and, I believe, a great help to a fellow.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I have been a constant reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for some years, and I want to say it is the best that I have ever read. It contains each week such good, clean, interesting reading that any one who reads it will never quit.

DEAR JOHN NORTH: I am a constant reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and am particularly interested in the section "Where To Go and How To Get There." It has always fascinated me.

There, that will give you some trifling idea as to what John North's department means to millions and millions of readers all over the world.

Did I hear somebody say they was yearnin' to sing? Let's make it:

BILLY THE KID.

Billy was a bad man
And carried a big gun,
He was always after greasers
And kept 'em on the run.

He shot one every morning,
For to make his morning meal.
And let a white man sass him,
He was shore to feel his steel.

He kept folks in hot water,
And he stole from many a stage;
And when he was full of liquor
He was always in a rage.

But one day he met a man
Who was a whole lot badder.
And now he's dead,
And we ain't none the sadder.

Cherry, fair lady, you are not forgotten. Just listen, please, to F. A. Butler, Hewlett, Virginia:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I would like to say a word to you-all, for a change. Want to say that I have been a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a good long time and expect to continue

as long as I can raise the cash for it. Am an old man, living alone mostly, with a few cows and chickens, and the most pleasure I have is reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, while I am churning.

"Sure enjoy the Round-up talk until some crank comes along and tries to kick about the writers, and then I get sick, for they haven't got gumption enough to be judges, much less critics. It's sour grapes with them. As a whole, WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE authors are the finest lot of writers I ever read together, and I have read a lot of magazines and other fiction in my day.

"Of course, I have my favorites. Cherry Wilson comes first. I don't think Ray Humphreys is fair to Shorty. Shorty does all the work, and Sheriff Cook gets the credit."

As we have so often told you, nothing—no, nothing—gives us more pleasure than to have you tell us that the whole family reads and enjoys the magazine.

Please listen to Mrs. William Young on the subject:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: My husband, twenty-year-old daughter, and myself all read WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. We like the stories of the West. They tell its history of struggle and hardships, of its men of iron nerve, and of its women. I take my hat off to them.

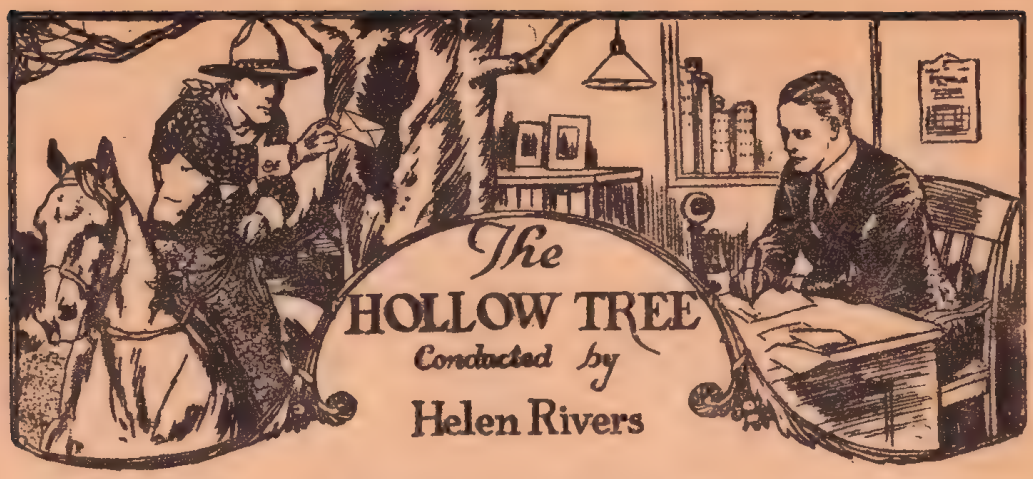
"I enjoy listening in each week to the Round-up. The ethics of fair play keep me from hitting a man when he's down, and, as Mewhirter has already been put in that reclining position, I'll just say that the only thing I find wrong with Robert Ormond Case's stories is, there aren't enough of them. DeLong and McQuirk are my favorites. Those two mavericks do not seem fictitious to me.

"Just one thing more, folks, and I'll sign off. I'd like to get the words of two old songs: 'Wedding Bells' and ''Neath the Shadow of the Pines.' The latter has the following words in it: 'We wandered 'neath the shadow of the pines, my love and I.'"

THE ARABIAN STEED

THE American government, recognizing that the great virtue of the Arabian horse, stamina, is desirable in producing lighter and stronger horses for the cavalry, is beginning to import Arabian horses for breeding purposes. While the Arab is, of course, famous for beauty, spirit, and speed, its quality of stamina is what makes it a prize breeder. It is said that the thoroughbred strain grows weaker unless crossed from time to time with Arab blood, and, after more than three or four generations, the strain must be again crossed.

Arabians are of all horses the best calculated to withstand the hardships of the desert, being used since uncounted centuries to sand and drought.



Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through the Hollow Tree.

OUT of Phoenix, the cattle rustlers of Arizona swung a wide loop on the open rangelands. Big outfits rounded up the fast-riding, quick-shooting cowboys to guard their range herds.

Dear Miss Rivers: I'm an old-time cowboy and bronc buster who has known the range in the days of the cattle rustlers. My time of riding was in the days when we didn't spend much time in a bunk house. We slept on the ground, with our saddles for pillows, and our saddle blankets for covers. Yes, I have ridden the range in Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, and Texas.

In Arizona there was one of the finest outfits I ever rode for, thirty miles out of Phoenix—the Bar M. This outfit, like all the rest, was losing cattle to rustlers. I rode up to the ranch house one day and asked the boss if he needed a new hand. He looked me over and asked me could I ride. I told him I was a-ridin' when I came in. So the old man took me out to the old pole-and-brush corral and told me to pick out my bunch of broncs. I picked out eight of the best in the string, all bays but one, and he was a buckskin—leggy and trim built. One of the broncs was a big chestnut-colored bunch of dynamite. I roped the chestnut and eared him down and got my saddle on him, with the help of four of the crew who held him down and kept the blindfold on him. When I had my riggin' all tightened up, I mounted him and pulled the blindfold off and—say—talk about your airplane rides! Let me tell you right now that this ball of lightning kept me a-guessin'. I whipped him over the head with my hat until we both gave out. Then I spent the rest of the day lying in the shade of the corral.

The next morning the old man came out to me and asked if I wanted to be range boss. So I told him that the first thing I wanted was some real he-men who could ride and shoot—and shoot straight. There was only one hombre in the whole outfit who could really ride a bronc. So I made a trip to Phoenix with a team and buckboard and brought out four old-time waddies from Wyoming. We were losing quite a bunch of cattle to rustlers, so I told the boys that the first thing we were going to do was to put a stop to the rustling. Well, to make a long story short, we got on the trail of the rustlers all right and got some of the Bar M stock back.

Wish some of the hombres who remember old "Two-gun" would write to me. I got that nickname during the cattle-rustling days when I always packed two low-hanging guns—tied down for quick action. For in those days one never knew when he would have to throw hot lead, and throw it ahead of the other hombre.

F. B. Howarth.

Box 160, Gold Beach, Oregon.

Out of Divide.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live on a sheep ranch, two miles out of Divide, a jerk-water town consisting of a general store and post office combined, a depot, and about a dozen houses. We are twenty-eight miles south of Butte, the mining town, and fifty miles north of Dillon, another town of fair size in southern Montana. Our ranch is about half a mile from the Big Hole River, and from what I can learn, the river is very treacherous. Beaver River Canyon is just a few miles out of Dillon, and the river is not so far from Divide. We have lots of mountain country around here, of course—spurs of the Rockies. Most of the ranches around in this part of the country are thousand-acre ranches or more.

My home State is Utah, and I also know Missouri pretty well. I've traveled quite a bit over the Western States and as far east as the Mississippi. I'm sixteen, folks, and my favorite pastime is horseback riding. I'll exchange snaps with my new Pen Pals.

PAULINE BARTON.

Care of E. Morrow, Divide, Montana.

Old-timer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was raised in Kentucky in my boyhood days, when the State was being homesteaded. Then I went to Oklahoma and put in some years in the days when Oklahoma was first being settled. Later I drifted into the Rockies, and I think I can call myself the frontier type of hombre. I am at home in the wilds, among the panthers and the mountain lions, and can get a foothold almost anywhere. I am thinking of going to Canada to homestead. Better come along, folks. No, I don't believe in trekking into any country without a pretty good grubstake. I'm rolling up a little grubstake to take along myself.

Would like to hear from all you folks who are interested in homesteads, and would like to hear from some of the Canadians as to the prospects up that way.

O. E. STREDDER.

Nelson, California.

Oregon country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I came to this Oregon country twenty years ago, and, after moving around some, decided to try berry and fruit ranching. This is a fine country to get a start on small capital, although there is plenty of hard work ahead to get a home fixed up and the ranch in shape. The climate and scenery and people are hard to beat, and there's room here for thousands and thousands as the country gets developed.

Some of the strangers coming to our town are puzzled by the appearance, on the side hills, of great sheds of shakes, and are told that these are ginseng and golden seal gardens that require shading in order to produce the best crops. The roots are dried, you know, and used as medicine. Out here there are many special crops, depending on the locality.

I'll be glad to answer what letters I can from folks interested in our wonderful Oregon.

W. R. WOODWORTH.

Box 93, Route 2, Estacada, Oregon.

The old-time range rider took the trail of the rustler on the open ranges of the West. Let the little friend-maker badge introduce you to these old-timers of the range.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

"I have lived in Michigan all my life, although I have traveled as far West as Colorado, and am very much interested in the cattle-range lands and in outdoor life in general. I'm planning a trip West to California and Washington this fall, and would like to hear from some of the hombres in Colorado, California, and Washington. Am just twenty-one, and anxious to hear from you-all," says William Lahman, Route 2, Box 29, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

"The old Holla is just like a pal of swimming-hole days. By wearing my badge during my travels I have met several hombres of the Gang. Now, folks, I'm hoping you'll snow me under with post-card views. In return I'll send the

best from Kentucky, including Mammoth Cave, Lincoln's birthplace, our famous race-horse scenes, and our Kentucky blue grass. I'm twenty-seven, folks, and an instructor in music." This Gangster is Lon Snodgras, Harlan, Kentucky.

"I have seen a few sidewinders in my life, and have spent most of my time in the open," says J. Dunigan, Box 23, Saint Joe, Arkansas. This hombre is twenty-two, and wants the pards of the range to get in touch with him.

"I am a lonely lad of seventeen and am looking for a pal to trek the West with me. I want a square shooter and a fifty-fifty pal." This Gangster is Wilbur Lovinger, 1840 East 14th Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Hard-headed punchers, following the trail of the rugged, wild range, trekked the cow trails of the Rockies, and to the south into the Sierra Madre Mountains of old Mexico, breaking wild bronchos as they went.

Dear Miss Rivers: Eighteen hundred miles from home, and only a boy of sixteen, I first experienced range life in the wild and open country of northern Montana. I roamed up and down the Rockies nine times, breaking horses, and I made seven trips from Carson City and Reno, Nevada, to the Eastern markets, with a string of horses each time, and each time returning in the saddle. I made one trip in the saddle in company with six old punchers, under the leadership of "Owyhee Bill," a European horseman. Owyhee Bill later became an outlaw and killer, and his wild career ended when he trailed into Old Mexico and killed four Texas rangers and then turned his shooting iron on himself. He was one of the worst outlaws that Texas has ever known.

I made a lone-wolf trip starting from the extreme southern part of the Sierra Madre Mountains of Old Mexico and trekking up through the Rockies to the Pelly River, in Yukon Territory. I trekked across to the Mackenzie River and down the Mackenzie to Great Slave Lake, then to Lake Athabasca, and along the southern shores of the Hudson Bay and James Bay and on to Montreal. The trip was made in the saddle the entire distance. An hombre who travels in the saddle gets a chance to wander into all of the out-of-the-way places, and I've visited a lot of camps along the trail, too—logging camps, mining camps, cow camps, sheep camps, halfway corners, and the strangest of them all—the outlaws' hiding places. I've stood at gambling tables where it was dangerous to be even as an onlooker, where men with eyes headed for fortune stood with arms twitching, ready to take a life—to shoot in cold blood at the smallest provocation.

Although I've made many a lone-wolf trek up and down and across the country, I've also palled and ridden with some of the famous riders. I have ridden with "Colorado Charley," world-famous rifle shot and once a Western bandit. I know the tune of the rope, the whine of the bullet, and guns from the old pepper-box to the latest automatic. I am no box head at judging a saddle, and I know how to stay on the arched back of a bronc. I am most at home in the saddle, but I have camped with the northern Indians on the dog trail up in the Pine Tree district when the temperature was forty-two below; I have paddled fur canoes across Reindeer Lake and down the Nelson River with half-breed Indians, crossed the frozen Laird River six times, set traps on the "Storm Water," and trailed elk with Eskimos in the Muskeg district. Yes, I have fought the blizzards of the Canadian wilds! And, on the other hand, I have crossed the muddy Rio Grande on the back of a crippled Indian pony, ridden the range down in the Panhandle for less than forty and found, and have spent as high as sixty-five bucks for a rope, a hundred for a saddle, and a hundred and fifty for a couple of frontier .44 Colts.

My trail has been a jumble of adventures, dangers, and hardships, and it has all left me a little older and with only my sad and joyous memories of the days I will enjoy no more. And now if any of you folks are hankering for some old-time yarns about the out-of-the-way corners, round-ups, trail herds, wild hosses, and bad men, just drop a line, for I reckon I can interest the hombres who know the touch of the wanderlust.

Blustry Bill.

Care of The Tree.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by *John North*

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE oil fields of the West have called forth considerable interest on the part of our readers lately. Some weeks ago, R. E., of Iraan, Texas, held forth on the prospects in the Lone Star State, and now O. L. H., of San Francisco, is volunteering information about how the job is done in the Golden State. He says:

"After reading in your department, Mr. North, a letter of information about the oil fields of Texas, I beg leave to supply a little information concerning the oil fields of California, coming from my own experiences. R. E., of Texas, advises any one wishing to get into the oil game to start in a roustabout gang. That is a good way to break in, but is not necessary.

"As a roustabout, or 'roughneck,' as they are termed by oil workers, a man will come in contact with all sorts of pipe-line work, which includes oil, water, gas, and steam, where steam is used; but seldom does he handle anything over four-inch pipe. Anything over that will come under the operations of the pipe-line department, a department maintained separately from the drilling and production gangs. The pipe-line department is concerned wholly with the main line, which conveys the oil to shipping points, the oil being heated and relayed to the shipping point by pumping stations situated at intervals of a certain mileage.

"Each gang has a boss, or 'pusher,' a position which is attained by experience and seniority. The wages of a roughneck are from four to five dollars for an eight-hour working day. The pusher gets from six and a half dollars to seven dollars.

"Roustabouts rarely have anything to do with tubing or sucker rods. This only happens when the well-pullers gang is short of help or when a clean-out gang needs help in a well that has to have the casing pulled.

"The next job a roughneck will fall heir to is usually that of a well puller. There are four men in a well-pulling gang—the pusher, two floor men, and a derrick man. Well pullers are the

men who pull the sucker rods and the tubing from a producing well that has ceased to pump because of gas pressure and sand shifting on the bottom of the well. Often the sand will work quite a way up the tubing and pack very tightly. That is what is called 'sanded up.' That means a 'wet job,' as the pulling process is termed, for what oil is above the sand is forced out the top by gas pressure and as a stand of tubing—about sixty feet, three joints—is pulled up the tubing board, the oil rains down on the floor workers.

"Also, when the tubing is broken at the floor joint the oil, water, and sand come down out of the loose stand in a great splatter. After the tubing is out the well is baled out by means of putting a baler bottom on a stand of tubing, running this into the well on a sand line, and picking up the sand, water, and shale on the bottom of the well. The baler bottom is made of steel and is of the same diameter as the tubing to which it is screwed, about twelve inches long, and has a ball-and-socket trap or a flap trap on the bottom, the ball-and-socket trap having a long tongue protruding from the ball. The baler bottom with the hinged trap is a Baker bottom and opens from the side with a wrench. The ball-and-socket baler is opened by the weight of the loaded tubing forcing the tongue and ball up away from the socket opening. This lets the contents of the tubing out into the dump box.

"R. E. spoke of spudding in the drilling work. Spudding is simply raising the tools up and letting them fall while in the hole. This is done only with standard or old-style tools, now obsolete in development work. Standard tools consist of the stem, a four-inch solid-steel bar about thirty feet in length, a set of jars—two great steel links working inside each other—to jar the tools loose in case they stick, and the drill bit, the size conforming with the size hole to be drilled. These tools are used now only for cleaning out old wells and repair work, where the water is giving lots of trouble at the bottom.

"Drilling for oil is now done with rotary drills. The drill is rotated on the same principle as a hand drill by machinery, and as the hole is made the casing is taken right with it, being made up on the bit and used as a medium to turn the bit. The rotary drill makes feet where the old standard could not make an inch.

"The first string of casing is called the water string, the next inside string is the oil string. Then the tubing, and inside of that the sucker rods which work the ball-and-seat valve in the pump fastened on the bottom of the tubing. And you're pumping oil."

O. L. H. very generously offers to explain any points which are not clear in his letter, to answer questions, and to give additional information to anybody who wants it. Address your letter about the California oil fields to O. L. H., of San Francisco, California, in care of this department.

And now we are going to shift the conversation to mining, which is also an ever-favorite topic with our readers. "I'm interested in the mining possibilities up in British Columbia, Mr. North, in the vicinity of the town of Stewart," writes Charles G., of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "Can you tell me what the wages are up there, what sort of living accommodations a hombre has to put up with, and what the climate is like? I've been planning to trek up that way some time soon if prospects look good."

Well, luckily for everybody concerned, I had a letter to-day from a chap who works in the mines up that way, and so I'm just going to print his epistle, for in it Charlie will find the information that he craves.

"I see a lot of questions in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, Mr. North, relative to work in the mines of British Colum-

bia," writes Miner Mike, "so I will give what information I have on the subject. We'll start with the conditions at the Premier Mine. From April to about the end of October work is plentiful. The wages are from four and one quarter dollars per day to six dollars. The accommodations are the best that a man could look for—steam heat, shower baths, pool room, library, and gymnasium. They have a dance up there about once a month, and two movies a week. Men working at the Premier have a much better time than anybody else in the camp. I'm telling you about this mine because it's the biggest in the camp. Board is one dollar and twenty cents a day, and this is a good place for a young fellow to make a stake.

"The other mines in this section are much smaller, hiring from four to twenty men, and generally close down during the winter. The wages are five dollars per day and board, but the accommodations are not so good. I worked at one of these mines two years ago. They paid four and a half dollars a day and charge a dollar and a half for grub.

"As to climate, most folks seem to have a funny idea of what the weather is like up here. A few years ago a number of school-teachers and business people from New York were touring Canada and decided to make the trip from Vancouver to Stewart. They arrived here in July with heavy clothing and fur coats. You would think they were headed for the north pole, the way they were dressed.

"This may be the North, but you have much colder weather in New York than we have here. This last winter, the coldest day was six below zero. Zero weather lasted for about ten days, and this is known as the coldest winter that the town of Stewart has ever had. We have very little cold but lots of rain and snow. The first winter that I stayed here it snowed seventy-three feet, and that year is known as the winter of the Big Snow. It often makes me feel glad, when I'm reading a Western story in which the prospectors almost die of thirst, that I do not have to put up with that kind of stuff here in British Columbia.

"Stewart is an outfitting town for trappers going into the interior for the winter. Two years ago about twelve different outfits went in from here. Spuds, onions, carrots, turnips, cabbage, peas, beans, and lettuce all grow in Stewart, as well as raspberries and strawberries."

This hombre volunteers to give additional information to you folks who are interested. Address your letters of inquiry to Miner Mike, and they will be promptly forwarded.

SHEEP VERSUS DOG VERSUS MAN

IT never does, they say, to interfere in other peoples' quarrels, for you never can tell which way the wind will blow, and it may blow in your direction. The workman of Wellsville, New York, who recently attempted to save a collie dog from the repeated buntings of a certain sheep, may have had the kindest intentions, but he soon found that this is a world of misunderstandings. For, in trying to save the dog, he drew the attention of the sheep to himself, and the bunt intended for the collie was directed with some spirit at the man. The dog, furthermore, far from taking this opportune moment to make his escape, or to assist the man who had taken pity on him, leaped into the fray and attacked his would-be savior from the rear. The workman was compelled to direct all his attention and energy to getting himself out of his own predicament. It seemed the dog and sheep were only romping.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

MORGAN, WILLIE.—Born in Elk Valley, Tennessee. Last seen in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1912. Information appreciated by his brother, John Vaughn, Box 72, Fort Meade, South Dakota.

BULLINGTON, BILL.—Five feet, six inches tall, dark-red curly hair, and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. A barber. Last heard from in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in 1928. Please write to your niece, Mrs. Cora Casey, Route 3, Box 105, Jennings, Oklahoma.

BULLINGTON, GEORGE.—Sixty years old. Last heard from in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by his niece, Mrs. Cora Casey, Route 3, Box 105, Jennings, Oklahoma.

WILLIAMS, CURLY.—Last seen in Cadiz, Ohio, in 1927. Please write to Red, Robert H. Maynard, Thirty-first Hospital Co., Eleventh Medical Regiment, Honolulu, Hawaii.

RITCHEY, CAPTAIN ANDREW.—Information appreciated by E. Ritchey, Hotchkiss, Colorado.

BURRISS, BETTY.—Last heard from in Florence, South Carolina. Please write to G., care of this magazine.

YOUNGMAN, CHARLES FREDERICK.—Forty-eight years old. Born in Germany. First joint missing from middle finger of left hand. A bookkeeper. Left Houston, Texas, about ten years ago. Information appreciated by T. H. Tyler, care of the Rice Hotel, Houston, Texas.

SAWYER, HARRY A.—Last heard from in Seminole, Oklahoma, in June, 1928. Information appreciated by Mother, care of this magazine.

HORTON, G. C.—Worked as team foreman for the Pine Valley Lumber Co., at Pine Valley, Oklahoma, in 1927. Last known address was, in January, 1928, 144 South Main Street, Los Angeles, California. Believed to have gone to Calipatria, California. Information appreciated by R. J. Norman, Lamar Hotel, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

MILTON.—Have you forgotten April and May of 1913? I am sorry things went wrong. Will never forget you. If you want to hear from me, please write to Ruth, care of this magazine.

O'LEARY, PATRICK.—Twenty-two years old. Five feet, eight inches tall. Born in Ireland. We met in January, 1928, at Pomona, California, and traveled together to Vaughn, New Mexico. You went on to Chicago, Illinois. Please write to Dennis F. Tippie, 1625 East Fourth Street, Hutchinson, Kansas.

HAWDON, JAMES FREDERICK.—Last known address was 22½ North Front Street, Portland, Oregon. Please write to your mother, 55 Hollis Street, Grimsby, Lincolnshire, England.

PHILLIPS, W. J.—Last heard from in Evansville, Indiana, in 1909. Information appreciated by Phil Phillips, 533 North Virginia Street, Reno, Nevada.

WELLMAN, EVERETT.—Thirty-five years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall, black hair, and weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds. Your little daughter wants to hear from you. Please write to her, care of your mother, Mrs. Anna Wellman, 798 North Eleventh Street, Noblesville, Indiana.

D. L. P.—You are forgiven. Have settled with Cork and Bond. Please write to H. P., care of this magazine.

NELSON, PETER W.—Last heard from in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Mother worries about you. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Russell May, Route 3, Port Huron, Michigan.

JACK.—No matter what happens, I love you. Sugar and son miss you. Please write to Retta, care of this magazine.

McCANN, MAGGIE MAY, and GROTWOLD, ESTHER ROOSEFELT.—My daughters. Maggie was born at the Lancaster County Hospital, Lancaster City, Pennsylvania, thirty years ago. She was adopted from there when she was three years old. Esther was born in a hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was adopted from there when she was four years old. I was very ill at the time and unable to look after my children. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary K. Brown, 1022 North Adams Street, Peoria, Illinois.

PACTON, DANIEL.—About eighteen years old. Blond hair and blue eyes. Worked at one time on a farm near Austin, Minnesota. Please write to your sister, Mary Kinaan, 1509 Eleventh Avenue South, Fargo, North Dakota.

CARLISLE, A. E.—Please come home or write to Mother, care of this magazine.

BURNS, SHORTY.—Please write to H. J. H., care of this magazine.

SHURM, NORMAN and FRED.—My brother and father. Lived at one time in Sheffield, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by Mrs. Gladys Gowins, Route 2, East Canton, Ohio.

CARTER, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.—My father. Married Lillie Shephard, at Harrisbury, Illinois, and later they separated. Last heard from in 1896. Information appreciated by Burl Carter Baker, 2412 West Brown Street, Alton, Illinois.

DANIELS, RALPH E.—Please write to your niece, Mrs. Bernice Dare, 803 Gilbert Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

SON.—There has been no news. Trust you to keep the promise you made to me in the maize field. Please write to Mama, care of this magazine.

LYONS.—Would like to hear from relatives of Thomas Lyons. He is nearly seventy years old, and in poor health. Was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and left there at the age of seventeen. Please write to Reader, care of this magazine.

BABY HOLIEN.—Born in Lancaster City, Pennsylvania, in 1900. I was taken sick when he was very small, and the baby was sent to the orphan asylum, and was later adopted from there. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary K. Brown, 1022 North Adams Street, Peoria, Illinois.

GARDNER, OLIVER JARVIS.—Last heard from in Springford, Ontario, Canada. Information appreciated by Mary Gardner Coughlin, 2170 University Avenue, Morgantown, West Virginia.

VIOLET.—Please forgive me. I am heartbroken by our quarrel. I did not mean all that was said at Superior, Montana. Baby was born in November, 1928. We did not go on to Vancouver. Please write to your mother, Mrs. John Gordon, Oakland, California.

KING, PATRICK.—Twenty-nine years old. Five feet, seven inches tall, black hair, and blue eyes. Left Scranton, Pennsylvania, nine years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Michael Art King, 2905 Pittston Avenue, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

AMAS, PANSY.—Must see you before camp time. Unforeseen things have happened. Please write to Tawny, care of this magazine.

G. E. B.—Your best friend will still do all he can to help you. Please write to S. J. Ulen, care of this magazine.

COOK, MRS. MARY.—Last heard from in Morrisville, New York. Please write to your brother, Bennie Gifford, Battery B, Tenth F. A., Fort Lewis, Washington.

VAN DE WEGE, WILLIAM.—In 1884, when he was fifty-six years old, he left Holland and went to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Had three daughters and five sons. Later they moved to Minnesota. Information concerning his descendants appreciated by the daughter of his nephew, Jennie Van de Wege, R. R. 1, Vittoria, Ontario, Canada.

KERSALL, JAMES LEONARD.—Five feet, six inches tall, brown hair, and blue-gray eyes. Left Stockport, Cheshire, England, twenty-four years ago, and has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by his sister, Edith, care of this magazine.

GREEN, LEOPOLD.—The adopted son of Mrs. David Mender, of 10 Eaton Place, White Horse Lane, Stepney, London, England, and my foster brother. Last heard from in Canada, in 1904. Information appreciated by Mrs. A. Rogers, 114 South Grove Buildings, London E 3, England.

RUSSELL H. H.—Everything O. K. Please write to L. G. W., care of this magazine.

SANTIE, GILBERT S.—When last seen, August 30, 1921, was a member of Battery C, Seventy-eighth Field Artillery. Information appreciated by a friend, Joseph B. Dotson, 801 North Central Avenue, Medford, Oregon.

ALLEN, RICHARD F.—A plumber. Born in Bangor, Maine, and lived in South Chicago, Illinois, and Boston, Massachusetts. Information appreciated by his daughter, Loretta, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any one who served in Battery B, Forty-first C. A. C., Fort Kamehameha, Hawaii, from January 21, 1924, to June 22, 1926. Address Sam Sisk, R. F. D. 1, Lexington, Tennessee.

ALFRED.—What is the matter? I still love you. Please come home or write to your wife, May, care of this magazine.

WICKES, CHARLES DENISON.—Information appreciated by his brother, Alfred W. Wickes, 819 East Weldon Street, Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

LINN.—Mrs. S. is dead. B. made payments. M. needs you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

LAIN, or CHANDLER, ANNIE FLORENCE.—My half sister. Was taken from Mineral, Kansas, in 1903, by her mother, Elizabeth Lain. Our father, John B. Lain, is in Hellier, Kentucky. Information appreciated by Arrie Fannie Lain, care of F. White, 3001 Dennison Avenue, San Pedro, California.

DOMINGUEZ, D.—You are needed at home. Please write to Felina R. D., 4260 Taylor Street, North, San Diego, California.

CHESTER, ROBERT ALFRED.—Left England, in 1925, for New South Wales, Australia. Information appreciated by his cousin, Kenneth Roy Tremble, Hudson Bay Company, Fort Vermilion, Alberta, Canada.

ATTENTION.—My brother, C. B. Wilkins, is supposed to have died in Netley Hospital, London, England, in 1916. I would like to hear from any doctors or nurses on the staff of that hospital at the time he died, or from any one who knew him. Please write to E. O. W., care of this magazine.

WALTER, L.—Want to come to you. Please write to Elsie, care of this magazine.

MOSSBROOK, MARGARET.—Last known address was, in 1923, 1015 West Sixty-ninth Street, Los Angeles, California. Had a brother living in El Monte, California. Information appreciated by J., care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, JIM and WALTER.—Left Missouri, several years ago, for Georgia. Jim later went to California. My father, John Williams, went to Texas, and lost track of his brothers. Information appreciated by Henry C. Williams, St. Louis, Oklahoma.

POE, DOLLIE and WILEY.—Formerly of Texas. Dollie was last heard from in Lexington, Oklahoma. Wiley was last heard from in Arizona. Information appreciated by their nephew, Henry C. Williams, St. Louis, Oklahoma.

MURNANE, HORACE.—Have something to tell you. Please write to Lulie Charon, 212 Twenty-second Street, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

BROWN, EDWARD E.—Last seen in New London, Connecticut, in April, 1929. Please write to Mrs. Elsie L. Brown, Box 543, New London, Connecticut.

SHADDOX, SHORTY.—Last heard from in Sweetwater, Texas, in June, 1928. Information appreciated by his son, Troy Shaddox, Route A, Box 15, Spur, Texas.

ENGLEBRIGHT, WILLIS.—Last heard from in McCaney, Texas, in August, 1923. Please write to Mother, Panama, Oklahoma.

MacGUIRE, MARGUERITE.—Came from Glasgow, Scotland, in 1912, and lived for some time near Pompton Lakes, New Jersey. Information appreciated by Alexander Lawrence Smith, 2505 Forty-first Street, Long Island City, New York.

NOTICE.—Ralph Bertram Masters was killed in an automobile accident, in Akron, Ohio, last fall. Information concerning his relatives appreciated by Ruth Knapp, Ripley, West Virginia.

NOMAD KID.—There are some letters waiting for you at home. I worry about you all the time. No one else will know where you are if you will write to your mother, Mrs. C. D., care of this magazine.

ESCH, OLIVE.—There is a letter for you at this office. Please send for it. Address Mother, care of this magazine.

GREGORY, FRANK.—Left Galeton, Pennsylvania, twenty-one years ago, with his family. Please write to your old friend, Henry Dracetto, Osceola, Pennsylvania.

WEANER, BOB.—Last heard from in New Mexico. Please write to your old friend, Larry, care of this magazine.

JILTON, WOOLSEY.—Five feet, eleven inches tall, fair complexion, and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Left home in September, 1924. Last heard from in January, 1928. Information appreciated by his father, H. S. Jilton, 45 Exum Street, Johnson City, Tennessee.

LIBBY or BERT.—Last heard from in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. Know all and am sorry I did not understand before. Am anxious to know how you are. Please write to Pay, care of this magazine.

T. E. F.—An important letter is being held for you at this office. Address M., care of this magazine.

KIOLER, WILLIAM, or GILLER, JOSEPH.—Twenty-two years old. Left home, May 14, 1923, with Morris Russell, or Kioler. Mother is very worried about him. Information appreciated by his sister, B. P. K., care of this magazine.

RUTH, INA and RAY.—Of San Francisco. Have made good and am lonesome for you. Please write to Turner, care of this magazine.

LONG, BEN F.—Last seen in 1917. Information appreciated by an old friend, Clem Shaner, Hillsboro, Oregon.

OLFERS, KARL O.—Six feet tall, blue eyes, and light hair. Information appreciated by Mrs. R. Fairbanks, Box 2003, Taft, California.

WEIGHOUS, TED.—Please come home or write to Mrs. Ted Weighous, 310 East North Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

WAKEFIELD, PHYLISS.—Last heard from in El Paso, Texas, in 1925. Very important. Please write to Mrs. Ted Weighous, 310 East North Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

FLINT, CLYDE.—Formerly of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. I love you. Please come back or write to Elsie, care of this magazine.

CRAIG, HATTIE, and GEORGIA CARTER.—My sister and my niece. Hattie is fifty years old, has black hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Georgia has a light complexion and blue eyes. Last known address was, in January, 1926, R. F. D. 3, Box 78, Springfield, Missouri. Information appreciated by Mrs. W. D. Hoyt, Route 1, Box 46, Fort Pierce, Florida.

REED, MRS. GEORGE, nee ELLEN SMITH.—Forty-five years old. Dark eyes and hair. Information appreciated by her half brother, P. C. Arnold, Dry Prong, Louisiana.

McLAUGHLIN and O'HEARN.—Would like to hear from any one having these names. Address J. W. McL., care of this magazine.

SWOPE, WALTER BRIAN.—Thirty-one years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, black hair and eyes. Weighs about one hundred and fifty-five pounds. A butcher. Last heard from in Brawley, California. Believed to be in Texas. Information appreciated by Mrs. W. Swope, Filer, Idaho.

MILLER, CHARLIE.—Five feet, eight inches tall, light hair, fair complexion, and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Left home eight years ago. Was in the army for three years and last heard from in Bristol, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by his father, A. L. Miller, Senia, North Carolina.

MAGNER, WILLIAM, JOSEPH, and THOMAS.—Last heard from ten years ago. Please write to your brother, James F. Magner, Sternberg General Hospital, Manila, Philippine Islands.

WALTERS, W. C.—Last heard from in San Pedro, California, in 1928. Please write to your old shipmate, James F. Magner, Sternberg General Hospital, Manila, Philippine Islands.

ALPHONSE C.—Are you still in Memphis? I am anxious about you. Please write to mother, D. C., 730 Camp Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

SPEEDY.—All difficulties adjusted, on job and otherwise, by your cousin, Frank. You can help yourself and me most by returning at once or writing to Ruth, care of this magazine.

SMITH, HARRY L., or WHITEY.—Of Detroit. Wife's name is Myrtle. Please write to S. V., care of this magazine.

FIELDER, FRED.—Of Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by S. V., care of this magazine.

THOMASON, OSCAR.—I am sorry for everything. I love you. Come home; your work awaits you. Your wife, Mrs. O. T., care of this magazine.

McLEAN, CHARLES ROLLAND.—Forty-three years old, dark hair and light complexion. Mother is very ill. Please write to Maurice H. McLean, 274 St. Clair Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

HOBBY, CARL.—Formerly of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Last heard from in November, 1925, when he was a sailor on the U. S. S. "Whippoorwill," at Honolulu, Hawaii. Have recovered from the accident. Information appreciated by Baby S., care of this magazine.

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

HAPPY VALLEY

By George Owen Baxter

A new story by this popular author, filled with adventure, romance, and danger.

DYNAMIGHTY DOG!

By Ray Humphreys

The sheriff had a special test for finding out whether a dog's great-aunt was a bloodhound. Sometimes it worked.

WESTERN TAUGHT

By Howard E. Morgan

Here were people who would not take money in exchange for hospitality. This was something new to the miser.

Also Features by

Robert Ormond Case **Howard J. Perry**
George Gilbert **And Others**

15c a Copy **At All News Stands**

FAR WEST STORIES

Evenly-matched rivals were the Western foreman and the Eastern football hero, yet stronger than both was the desert, which tried their courage to the uttermost. How the two strong men, who struggled for a single prize, met the desert's fiery ordeal, you will find by reading the novelette

LAST CHANCE

By Christopher B. Booth

in the September issue of FAR WEST STORIES—out August 15th.

Also featured in this issue,

A stirring novelette about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,

CORPORAL GRAFTON, R. C. M. P.

By S. S. Gordon

Vanished without a trace, came the report about the three troopers. Inspector Dawson's men were not the kind to quit, so he sent his best man out to investigate. What Corporal Grafton found was strange beyond man's wildest fancies, but the corporal was worthy of his trust.

Complete, also, in this issue, stories by

Herbert Farris **Allan Hawkwood** **J. Allan Dunn**

Published Monthly **Twenty Cents a Copy**

Smashing Price Reduction

ONLY $59.95

for Luxurious Overstuffed Parlor Suite *With* 3 LAMPS

Smashing the price down to $59.95—slashing production costs to save Spear friends 30%—GIVING AWAY 3 beautiful lamps in addition—Spear challenges the whole country to beat this Biggest of all Bargains . . . this beautiful, new style, 3-piece Overstuffed Velour Suite.

And not stopping with this gigantic VALUE, Spear offers the most liberal of FREE CREDIT TERMS—only $1 with order, 30 days FREE home trial, a whole Year to Pay. No home can afford to be without this wonderful suite at this price and on these easy terms.

This luxurious suite would sell for $90 and up, anywhere else. It's the newest in furniture! Velour living room suites are the latest fashion. The newest in lamps, too—the new style matched set, all 3 the same color. How can we offer such a remarkable value? Well, here's the secret! It's original with Spear. We made the Davenport a few inches shorter than the usual models (the costly kind)—saved inches to shave dollars off the price. You'll never realize it. You would never know, if we didn't tell you. You'll have to measure it yourself to find the difference. It's a highly practical size.

This Davenport is 64 in. wide overall, instead of the usual 72 in. Then we dispensed with the costly removable cushions—another Big Saving. The surprising thing is that most people like this Davenport better. In short, we kept the quality, eliminated the frills. Davenport is 64 in. wide overall. 52 in. wide between arms. Back 19 in. high. There are 18 coil springs in the seat.

Another striking feature of this suite is the new style Club Chair and Club Rocker to match the Davenport. Suite is built with sturdy Hardwood frames, in beautiful brown Mahogany finish. Covering of serviceable blue and taupe Figured Velour, drawn smooth and snug over sanitary interior upholstering materials. Extra comfortable. Extra sturdy. Club chair and rocker 32 in. wide overall. Seats 21 x 20 in. Backs 21 in. high. 5 coil springs in the seat of each chair, well padded. The ideal size for modern home.

30 Days FREE Trial

The Set of 3 Lamps— GIVEN AWAY—are regular $15 to $20 value. They are truly beautiful. In polychrome finish, with turned metal shafts, graceful arms and polychrome metal bases. Shades are lustrous Rayon Seco, plaited over Rose Sateen lining, finished with metallic braid and decorated with a spray of Rayon Taffeta flowers. Each lamp has one socket, long connecting cord and 2-piece plug. For electricity only, bulbs not included. Floor lamp 61 inches high. Shade 17 x 13 inches. Bridge lamp 57 inches high, with adjustable arm. Shade 11 x 8 inches. Table Lamp 19 inches high. Shade 14 x 9 inches. Your choice of All Rose or All Blue shades. State preference.

$1 DOWN

SEND TODAY

New FALL Bargains

FREE Credit—20% to 40% Savings

Easier terms! Lower prices! 1278 Big Bargains for FALL—all on Credit. Everything for your home—furniture of all kinds, lamps, silverware, rugs, dishes, bedding, curtains, carpets, stoves, linoleum. Year to Pay. 30 Days FREE Trial. Your copy of this latest Spear Book is ready. Mail coupon NOW! No obligations!

Mail coupon today. Send only $1. If not completely satisfied after 30 days trial, return all, we will refund your money and transportation charges both ways.

Order No. GA 4265, 3-piece Suite with 3 lamps. [All Rose or All Blue Shades.] Price $59.95. Terms: $1 down, $4.75 monthly.

President

Spear & Co.

Dept. S 202 Pittsburgh, Pa.

Home Furnishers to the People of America for 36 Years

Mail Coupon TODAY!

SPEAR & CO., Dept. S 202
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me at once the 3-Piece Overstuffed Suite described above, and the 3 Lamps which are GIVEN as understood that, if I am satisfied, I will send you $4.75 monthly. Order No. GA 4265. Price $59.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. If you want Rose Lamp Shades put X here ☐ If you want Blue Lamp Shades put X here ☐

Name ----------

R. F. D., Box No. or St. and No. ----------

Post Office ---------- State ----------

CATALOG FREE—If you want our FREE catalog only, send no money, put an X in square and write name and address plainly on above lines ☐